The WASP

THEODORE GOODRIDGE ROBERTS

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BY

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THE WASP

I

Ye who have seen the blush and bloom,
  The pearly sheen and opal gleam
At sunrise, in a wide sea-room,
  Of a new landfall sweet as dream;

Ye who have seen the corpse-lights slide
  On swaying spars; ye who have known
The scent of spices on the tide,
  And roses, from the horizon blown;

And ye who dream these things—for you
  I cruise these summer isles again,
And drive my adventurous children through
  The straits of Youth and Joy and Pain.

An honest tale for honest hearts;
  Good men and bad to do and dare,
And lovers blithe to play their parts—
  Lay on to my salt sailor fare!

JAMES BURNHAM had been in London a matter of three weeks when, one October morning in the year 1698, he stepped into the doorway of a Cheapside shop to let a company of jailbirds from Newgate go by with their guards.

Captain Sterling, a wealthy planter of Nevis in the West Indies, had purchased two hundred malefactors from the historic prison and was now marching them to Billingsgate, off which lay the brig *Good Cheer,* all ready for her freight of hopeless humanity and her long voyage to the south and west.

The jailbirds walked in pairs, ironed at wrists and ankles. Many were young, many were in middle life, and only a few were old—for the gentleman from Nevis had made a good bargain with the authorities of the jail. Some of the poor devils wept openly, some cursed and raved, and others walked with closed eyes and stricken faces.

The escort of this pitiful and foul company was a rabble. All of its members were armed and many of them were intoxicated. It was a sight to wrench a man's heart; but Burnham looked out at it coldly from the doorway of the little shop. His heart was of no more value than a lump of stone, so far as emotions were concerned. It could be heated, but it could not be melted.

He looked on at the cruelest sight to be seen that day in all England with a cool and ironic glance. Yet his interest was somewhat quickened upon beholding a known face in that pitiful procession. It was a thin face, but still a square one—the face of John Trimmer, the son of the tailor of Wantage.

The black and tortured eyes of the jailbird met the pale-gray eyes of the gentleman in the doorway.

"A merry voyage to you, John!" cried Burnham, with a wave of the hand.

"And the same merry voyage to you, Master James Burnham!" the malefactor cried back.

The procession passed on amid groans, curses, jeers, and the clank of iron. At Billingsgate these children of despair, these damned shapes and stricken souls, were put into barges and ferried out to the waiting brig. They were lowered to the ballast in the brig's hold, in the stench of the foul bilge water. An hour later the *Good Cheer*—with all the elements of hell save fire in her hold—went down the river with the ebb tide.

James Burnham returned to his lodgings in Swan

Alley, St. Paul's Churchyard, in a black mood. That ghastly procession of thieves, housebreakers, masterless men, and footpads on their way to the plantations in the islands, and John Trimmer's face in the midst of it, had set his mind along a line of dark and uncomfortable reflections.

His own fortunes were at a dangerous ebb, and he was without hope of an immediate turn of the tide. Already he had been forced to several questionable and dangerous expedients for the replenishing of his pockets, and already he felt the eyes of suspicion upon him. His fingers were not clever enough for the improper manipulation of the dice and cards, it would seem; so what was left to him but the road?

He doubted if his grieved and indignant father would give him another chance. And his town companions, brawlers and reckless gamesters though they were, had eased away from him during the past two days. Even Kitty had deserted him—Kitty Trimmer, of Wantage, whom he had clothed

in rich silks and made merry with rare wines. Kitty had left him as a rat leaves a doomed ship.

James Burnham was the third of four brothers, the sons of Sir Walter Burnham, of Burnham, near Wantage in Berkshire. Sir Walter was a hard man and a hard rider, upright in his saddle and in his dealings with his fellows, high-tempered and unforgiving and full of peculiar whims.

One of his whims—and it took on the dignity of a passion with him—was to put his mark on every article in his possession. His mark was the heraldic device of the Burnhams of Burnham; or, in some cases, only a part of that device. Large and highly valued pieces of plate were engraved with the paternal arms, topped by the helmet, the wreath, and the crest, and underpinned by that brief but honorable and poetic statement, *"Expectans equito."*

On smaller pieces the crest only was cut. On his house of Burnham and on a dozen farmhouses and a score of cottages the four-barred hurdle, a device from his arms, was cut deep in the stone. But he drove his passion for putting his mark on things

even farther than this; and the crest of the Burnhams of Burnham, a conventional griffin, was tattooed just beneath the left shoulder blade of each of his four sons and of his one daughter.

All the sons of Sir Walter Burnham promised well and rode straight except James. James possessed the courage of his race and its dangerous temper, but he lacked the nice sense of honor that had ballasted the men of his family through stormy centuries.

He went to school and felled one of his masters with a book; he went up to Oxford, with a view to studying for the church, and laid a proctor low with a cudgel; he had a tender affair with the daughter of the tailor of Wantage, and first brought it to the ears of the public by discharging a pistol, without warning, at another of the lady's admirers—an admirer who unfortunately happened to be a magistrate and his own uncle on his mother's side.

He fled to London after this performance, but on his way was held up by a man in a mask. Thanks to his courage and swiftness, he overcame the gen-

tleman of the road, removed the mask, and discovered John Trimmer, of Wantage, the brother of his light-o'-love and son of the honest breeches-maker. He sat on the highwayman's heaving chest and laughed ironically. John's saddlebags were fairly well lined with the golden tolls of the road; and in return for half of that golden lining James agreed to consider the incident closed.

They shook hands on the agreement; then John Trimmer went his way and James Burnham his. So James arrived in London with full pockets, and soon sent to Wantage for Kitty Trimmer.

Kitty came, and for a week the game went merrily; gold was multiplied, silks were bought, and the lodgings in Swan Alley rang with mirth provoked by sound vintages. Kitty became a toast with a certain set of hell-rakes and its following of harmless young fools.

Then Burnham's luck changed suddenly, and he was forced to make use of loaded dice with some of the young fools. He did it clumsily, and the plucked fools took offense. On the heels of this, a

more skilful hell-rake played the same game on him, plucking him to the hide; and on the day following that dismal night the youngest of the fools, an ensign by the name of Stanton, took Kitty away from him.

This last was the shrewdest cut of all, though he would not admit it even to himself. He was fond of the girl, though he had not entertained any delusions about her even before her desertion.

James Burnham sat for a long time in grim thought. Pictures of his past and the picture of the daunting procession he had seen that very morning trailed through his mind. How long, he wondered, before he, too, would be on his way to the plantations—or the gallows?

The sight of John Trimmer in that gang had touched him keenly—not with pity for John, but with consciousness of the peril of his own position. He sat in a padded armchair, limp, with his laced hat still on his head. Something like defeat twisted his lips; but a menacing light shone in his pale eyes.

The room had not been touched in two nights and a day, for even the maid servant had deserted him. Blobs of wax and black wicks topped the candlesticks. Cards and dice lay on the table. Kitty's fan, a painted thing that he had given her, lay on the floor. Its frail sticks of fragrant wood had been crushed by a boot-heel. The heavy furnishings looked tawdry in the sunlight.

James sat up suddenly and smiled around him with a sinister grimace.

"To perdition with them all, and may the evil one get his twist on the heartless little wench!" he cried.

A tall bottle of green glass, half full of French brandy, stood among the cards on the table. He extended his right hand slowly, grasped the bottle, drew it to him, set it to his lips, and drained it. He flung the bottle violently across the room with an oath; it splintered against the wall and fell to the carpet in a dozen tinkling fragments. Then he settled back in his chair and glowered straight before him.

Footsteps sounded on the stairs, ascending briskly. James did not change his position, though his shoulders seemed to take on alert lines and his eyes turned toward the door. The door was flung open and a large man with a gray mustache and brick-red face looked into the room with a pair of eyes as quick and bright as blue lightning.

"So here you are, Master James!" he said coolly. "Lord, an' here's a hogsty for your father's son!" he added in a voice of frank disgust. "High noon, 'pon my soul, an' the cards still on the table an' the bottles on the floor! Ye'd look for more order an' decency in a carters' tavern—aye, and find it."

Burnham smiled sardonically; but a flicker of hope shot up in his insolent eyes. This big man on the threshold was William Stow, Sir Walter Burnham's steward. He had been born on Burnham land, had served in the army in his youth, and since then had served the Burnhams for thirty years. He was now Sir Walter's right-hand man.

"Good morning to you, William," said James.

"Welcome to the hogsty! Come in and sit down and give me the news."

Stow entered, closed the door behind him, and sat down in a chair close to the untidy table. He gazed curiously and scornfully around him as he placed his hat and elaborate walking cane on the carpet beside his large feet.

He was booted and spurred. He was dressed in his best and looked like a prosperous country freeholder of the class just verging into the small gentry from the substantial yeomanry. He showed his native honesty and dignity in face and figure. Having surveyed the room, his bright blue glance returned to Burnham's watchful and inscrutable face.

"Ye're to leave England, Master James—aye, and alone," he said. "In money and shame ye've cost yer father more than ye give any promise of ever being worth, though ye'd live a thousand years. Aye, ye're a disgrace to the family and the name, Master James!"

"Try to be civil, my good fellow," replied Burnham quietly.

"Civility be blistered!" retorted the other. "My heart burns at the thought of ye—of yer low deeds. To fire a pistol at an unarmed man! That was never the Burnham way. And all about a tailor's wench. And to turn highwayman atop of that! Lord save us!"

"Highwayman?" queried James, with a shadow in his pale eyes.

"Ye need not deny it," said Stow. "The ring ye sold to the Jew has been recovered by Sir Bertram Wise. The knight of Hanney has sharp eyes and a sharp nose, but he's in no mind to see the son of yer father kicking his heels in the wind. So ye're to go out of England, Master James, never to return. Ye're to go to Jamaica."

Burnham's courage flinched. He remembered the ring which he had taken from John Trimmer and sold to the Jew in Cheapside. Was he to be transported to those islands of despair? He turned a colorless face and a sickly grin upon the stalwart William Stow.

"It's what ye deserve, and no more," said Stow,

unmoved. "It's what would happen to ye were ye my son—which Heaven forbid! To the plantations ye'd go, like any common thief or slit-purse. Aye, ye would—an' rot of fever under the whips o' the drivers!"

Hope awoke again in Burnham's breast, for it was evident from Stow's words and manner that his fate was not to be so severe as the steward would like to see it. A little color returned to his cheeks and his insolent eyes danced. He laughed sharply.

"Bravely spoken!" he sneered. "And now will you be so good as to deliver me your master's message? I'll swear he didn't send you up to London to air your private opinions of morality."

"*The Lass o' London,* Captain Hobkirk, sails tomorrow," replied William Stow. "I've been aboard her already and done yer father's business with Master Hobkirk. And now I'll take ye aboard, as soon as we buy yer outfit for the voyage. Here's twenty guineas for that same outfit, and a letter of instructions to ye from Sir Walter. But hark ye,

the wench is not to go with ye. Mark that, Master James!"

"To thunder with the wench!" exclaimed Burnham with a twisted mouth and a cross-glint of his pale eyes, as if he were trying to look at his own nose. "She has flown the cage already, my good Stow. But will you condescend to tell me something more of my fate? I am bound for Jamaica, you say. What am I to do in Jamaica? Manufacture rum? Govern the island? Name it."

"When ye go ashore in Kingston, ye and the shipmaster will report to Mr. Angus McLatchy, sugar exporter, and the shipmaster will then put five hundred guineas into yer hands," answered Stow. "Five hundred guineas—and ye'll never see another shilling of yer poor father's money. Ye'll associate in trade with the worthy McLatchy, and multiply those guineas, or ye'll squander the money with the swine and the husks and rot in the mire—it's all one to us. But if ever ye come home to England, rich or poor, ye'll be clapped into prison

and soon set on another voyage without a box of gold!"

This was better than James had expected—much better than he had even dreamed. He had angered and disgraced his father, and was astonished and delighted to find him so generous. The mistake of his family in believing that he had already taken toll on the king's highway did not trouble him in the least, considering that it was the inspiration of the five hundred guineas.

As for the warning never to return to England—well, that did not trouble him, either. He was shrewd enough to suspect that if he should ever return with plenty of money and a respectable reputation he would be entirely welcome.

"Where is the money?" he asked.

William Stow smiled calmly and knowingly at that.

Captain Hobkirk proved to be a companionable person, ignorant of book learning and the usages of polite society, but full of a merry humor. He treated James Burnham with an easy mixture of

comradeship and respect; for to him Burnham was nothing worse than a wild young blood who, for family reasons, was to continue and conclude the seeding of his crop of wild grain far away from home. He had heard of such young bloods before.

James saw the shipmaster's point of view, and humored it. He kept his black temper well in hand and pretended a harmless but rollicking nature. He even pretended to be a good deal of a fool. He sang, he laughed more and more heartily than was his wont; he seemed to be easily overcome by wine, and he kept the devil out of his eyes. He was already learning the virtue of discretion and dissembling.

The long voyage wore along comfortably enough, with a moderate amount of fair winds and no rough weather. Contentment dwelt in the forecastle and good-fellowship in the cabin. James Burnham hoodwinked the shipmaster, the mates, and the crew, but he did not hoodwink himself. On the contrary, these weeks of peace and good-will acted like a tonic to his true nature. He began to long for vice and the excitements of tavern brawls and midnight dan-

gers. He longed for a fight. He saw that he was not born to peace under any conditions.

The ship was within a day of her destination when the sudden, clear dawn discovered another vessel to windward. The stranger was a topsail schooner. Hobkirk regarded her apprehensively through a long telescope, then passed the glass to the mate. Mr. Boyle looked and wagged his head.

Another head-sail was run up. The brass gun on the forecastle-head was cleared of its jacket and run aft. The boatswain served out cutlases to all hands.

"What is she?" asked Burnham, feeling a pleasant glow in his breast.

"A bloody pirate, I'll take my oath," returned Hobkirk. "Him they call Major Deck, maybe, or Duval the Frenchman. They both sail schooners for speed. It's a disgrace to England that every honest trader must run for his life and cargo every v'yage!"

II

BURNHAM'S pale eyes shone and glinted. His hands trembled on the taffrail and an artery pulsed visibly in his neck.

"You have a strong crew and a stout ship," he said. "Why not wait for them and give them a drubbing?"

"Wait for them?" repeated the shipmaster in a horrified voice. "Heaven help you, sir, but you don't know their kidney! A strong crew, say you? If we have forty seamen and the after-guard, that schooner carries one hundred and fifty devils—devils, sir!"

"But we have the taller ship," persisted Burnham, "and pistols in plenty. We could shoot down upon her decks; we could cut them down as they came over the side, one by one."

"Aye; and ye'd soon be whistling through a slit gizzard for your five hundred guineas!" retorted Hobkirk dryly.

He glanced at his passenger, then stared at him with round eyes. Burnham's gaze was fixed upon the schooner astern in a hard, dancing, cross-glinting glare. His white teeth gleamed between his twisted lips. His cheeks shone white. The veins stood out on his forehead and the artery pulsed in his neck. He breathed heavily.

"Lord, sir!" exclaimed the shipmaster. "Ye look as if ye'd jump the taffr'il to be at their throats."

James Burnham swallowed hard, laughed, and turned his back on the schooner. His eyelids fluttered swiftly.

"I enjoy a fight—none better," he said. "That is the first pirate ship I've ever seen, and it excited me for a moment."

"Excited you!" said the mariner. "Yes, but I'll swear it didn't fright ye. Bless my soul, sir, but ye looked as wicked as any red pirate yerself for a minute. A fighter, as I see—and I didn't suspect it before. Ye should be fightin' for yer king, that ye should. Ye'll be wasted as a merchant, sir."

Burnham laughed again and laid a hand on Hobkirk's shoulder.

"Oh, I'm no fire-eater, my friend," he said lightly; "but I have heard stories of those gentry astern that set my teeth on edge to be at them at the first sight of them. The sea should be cleaned of them. What are the king's ships doing?"

"A very noble sentiment, sir, and one as does credit to yer heart," said the shipmaster; "but the king's ships be all on the hunt after the French ships, and so it falls out that these spawn o' the evil one be masters o' the sea."

"Will she overhaul us, think you?" asked Burnham.

"Not unless she follows us clear into Kingston Harbor—if this wind holds. And it'll hold, ye may swear to that. We'll slip her this v'yage. She don't sail her old clip. Foul, like as not, an' needs to be hove up an' scrope, Heaven be praised!"

Burnham turned again and looked hungrily and viciously at the vessel far astern; then he went below and waited for his breakfast in a fretful temper.

He had hoped for a fight; and he cursed the schooner for her slowness.

Three hours later the pirate vessel shifted her helm, hopeless of coming up with her intended prey. The ship's company cheered at that; the cutlases and pistols were returned to the lazaretto beneath the captain's cabin, and the brass gun was pushed forward to its usual place in the bows.

Burnham continued to stand and glower after the schooner until Mr. Boyle, the mate, came to his elbow.

"We be properly in luck," he said. "If Hellfire Hicks had sighted us a couple of hours afore he did, we'd be dead men now, every mother's son of us!"

He was a big man with plump red cheeks and a very fine opinion of himself.

"Dead men!" sneered Burnham. "I suppose you mean you would have died of fright if the schooner had come within gunshot of you!"

He choked down the meaningless rage that had been brewing in him all these peaceful and unevent-

ful days, turned on his heel, and went below to the main cabin. If ever a man was spoiling for a fight it was James Burnham; and yet he did not want to shatter his reputation aboard the *Lass o' London* as a man of peace at this last hour of the voyage.

Boyle entered the cabin twenty seconds later.

"Now look ye here, my fine cock, what was this ye said about dying of fright?" he asked in a throaty and truculent whisper. "Henry Boyle takes no such talk as that from no man, be he common tar or lord's son!"

Burnham, who was seated on a locker, did not look up, but the muscles of his shoulders twitched slightly. The big mate leaned far across the table with his big hands fisted upon it.

"Ye don't look so keen for a fight yerself, just now," he sneered. "Be ye returnin' thanks to yer Maker for yer safe delivery from the pirates?"

Burnham sprang without a sound, vaulted the table, gripped the mate by the windpipe, and drove him against the larboard bulkhead.

And so Captain Hobkirk found them half a min-

ute later. Burnham loosened his grip, and the mate slid limply to the deck. Burnham smiled at the shipmaster.

"The fellow insulted me," he explained coolly. "The lout does not comprehend the nice feelings of a man of breeding."

Hobkirk dragged the half-choked and utterly cowed mate to his feet.

"Ye be too ready to pick a quarrel with yer betters, my lad," he said. "I trust this here will larn ye a lesson. A man who raises the devil in a peaceable gentleman like Mr. Burnham ought to be clapped into irons."

The long voyage terminated in an hour,—and James Burnham parted from Hobkirk and the crew on the best of terms. Mr. Boyle did not appear to wish him God-speed.

He found Angus McLatchy to be a Scot of the most respectable type, long-faced, bleak-browed, dry of hand, everlastingly turning from his ledger to his Bible and back again, and finding comfort and food for thought in both.

Burnham spent two nights and two days under the worthy merchant's roof. Both men conducted themselves coolly, watchfully, politely; but neither warmed to the other. McLatchy felt a sharp distrust of Burnham's eyes; and Burnham found nothing that appealed to him in McLatchy's nature, sugar, or Bible.

He envied the merchant the story told by the ledger, however. He looked inward and saw that his temper would not stand a great deal of McLatchy and his ways, and that the affair might terminate in a sudden and violent death.

He was beginning to know himself for what he really was. He saw a picture of himself braining the Scot with the weighty ledger. So, at the end of that brief period of two nights and two days, the decision was mutual that James Burnham, Esq., was not designed by nature for the sugar-exporting trade. James left the merchant's establishment with all his guineas intact and soon fell among gentlemen who had no dealings with either Bibles or ledgers.

Mr. Peter Queery, one of Burnham's new companions, was a man of about forty years of age, with a hard head and the most confiding manners in the world. He was a person of importance and substance—by his own telling, at least. His dress was always as accurate and rich as the climate permitted with any degree of comfort; his words were invariably polite and well-chosen; and he shone in that company of roistering blades—they were broken gentlemen, for the most part—with an air of kindly superiority.

From the very first his manner toward James Burnham was markedly considerate and intimate. This was subtly flattering, as if he saw and acknowledged the difference between Burnham and himself and their jovial but worthless companions. And yet there was nothing pedantic about him. He enjoyed the society of these reckless, good-natured, useless fellows, he said—and one instantly knew, without being told in so many words, that more respectable circles were open to him.

There is no need to picture you this society or

to describe its entertainments. James lost a little money at play—he would have lost a great deal but for his menacing eye—and heard many strange stories. He heard anecdotes of the pirates, privateers, and other doubtful characters of that time and those seas—of Major Deck, who had been a respectable planter in Barbados twelve months ago; of Duval, who was a Canadian gentleman and very polite in his methods of taking life and property; of Hellfire Hicks, who had once been a shopkeeper in one of the islands.

James was interested, and asked many questions.

"It's the way to make money," said one of the company. "It's a profession and a science. It calls for brains and courage. They all have their agents everywhere. Hicks keeps his books like any honest merchant, I've been told. Major Deck runs his business as a company, with a secretary, a treasurer, and goodness only knows what else. His wife drove him to it, they say, with her tantrums and her flirtations—and a fine, high-headed, swishing creature she is, too! A cousin of my own, by the way. Du-

val's methods are not so modern. He touches nothing but British shipping; and he has been known to square up to more than one sloop-of-war and fight for the glory of it. A very gentlemanly occupation, I assure you!"

"But there's hanging at the end of it," said Peter Queery.

"Not if you retire before you are caught," said another.

Every one had an opinion to advance on the subject; and, as a number of the gentlemen were well along in their cups, much was said that was not exactly to the point. But Burnham gave attention to everything. He was thirsty for information.

"Ten to one there's an agent of Major Deck's at this very table," remarked a thin young man with a yellow face. "And one of Hellfire Hicks's, too, like as not. Very respectable-appearing men, these pirates' agents are. There was one who lived a whole year with the governor of the Bermudas as a tutor. He got away one night with Dame Murdock's pearls and diamonds, and they couldn't find

hair nor hide of him; but when Captain Blue's brig was cornered among the Bahamas, three months later, by the sloop-of-war *Fox,* there was the tutor on the brig's poop, his sash full of pistols and a cutlas in his hand, the most desperate pirate of them all. He despatched five men with his own hand before he was cut down. A notorious pirate he was, and Blue's trusty—but he'd been born the son of a bishop and educated for holy orders."

James Burnham spent a month in Kingston, all the time in questionable society. His luck was good, and he paid his way with his winnings at dice and cards. Only on two occasions did any of his companions attempt to cheat him at play. On both occasions he proved himself a dangerous person to trifle with. His white rage struck terror to the hearts of the most daring of the company; and during the rest of his stay in Kingston a tremor of apprehension went through the nerves of his companions whenever his pale eyes hardened and began to glint crosswise, as if he were trying to examine the tip of his own nose.

At the end of the month Peter Queery suggested to James that they were both wasting their time in Kingston.

"Come home with me," he said; and he told Burnham, at considerable length, all about his fine place in the island of Nevis.

He had a command of language, and painted the joys of a planter's life to a wish. He admitted frankly that he liked James—that he felt a warmth of the heart toward him as toward a younger brother. This being the case, he was willing to take James into partnership with him. He was unmarried and had no near relatives.

Burnham entertained no intention of devoting his future to the cultivation of cane, but he was anxious to see something of the other islands before investing his modest capital. If Queery was fool enough to pay his expenses, so much the better. They left Kingston in a shabby, stubby brigantine—Burnham and Queery and Burnham's box of guineas. They sailed at an early hour of the morning, and they sat late at their wine that night at

the little round table in the cabin, with the master of the brigantine to keep them company, pledging each other's health and talking most amiably.

Queery laid a hand frequently on Burnham's shoulder.

"You know my place in Nevis," he would say to the master. "Well, I'll neglect it no longer. I've found a friend in this young gentleman—aye, and an heir, like as not. When I like a man, I like him without reservations. That's me! You know my little place?"

"I know it, sir," the shipmaster would reply. "The finest estate in that island, ye may lay to that, sir!"

At midnight Queery brewed a rum punch of great potency. James Burnham awoke at noon of the next day with a splitting head, a thick tongue, and a wavering, fainting stomach, and found himself drifting alone in an open boat. His dazed and aching mind was not able to comprehend the situation immediately.

"Poisoned!" he muttered at last. "Drugged! Robbed! Cast off—adrift in an open boat!"

There were oars, a square of sail-cloth, and a breaker of water in the boat. Burnham spread the piece of sail across the oars and lay down in the patch of shade, too sick to so much as curse Peter Queery.

The little boat rode the moderate seas gallantly, smoothly. A snow-white gull appeared, with red eyes and a red beak and wings as sharp and clean as curved knife-blades, and hung motionless high about the boat, preening the spotless feathers on its breast, riding the invisible tides of air with no flicker of effort. At last it slid downward, circled on arched pinions, hung low above the boat's stern for a few seconds and stared at the man beneath the awning with round, crimson eyes.

The man saw it and cursed feebly. The bird veered with a tremble of its wing-tips, circled and slanted upward, and returned to its old position and the preening of its spotless and untroubled breast.

In a running blue slope astern that was alive with

cross-fires of green and gold, a long and slender shadow wavered, grew in distinctness, and suddenly a black fin rode the sloping seas like a little sail. The fin circled the lazily riding boat, then sank gently and vanished for a time. The long shadow wavered like a ghost of darkness under the boat's counter.

The sun went down at last, and just before the sudden white stars were lit above the purpling sea, James Burnham awoke again from his heavy sleep and crawled slowly backward from beneath the square of sail-cloth.

He stood up in the stern of the boat and scanned the fading horizon. His face was haggard from the ravages of the drug, his hard eyes smoldered, his dry lips were slanted in a grimace of rage and horror. The horizon was empty. He lowered his glance and beheld, dim against the darkling sea, that convoying fin.

There was no food in the boat. Burnham drank deep from the oaken breaker, then lay flat on his back and stared up at the stars until sleep returned

to him. In his sleep he dreamed that he had Peter Queery's windpipe beneath his fingers; and he made the most of his opportunity, you may be sure. But the dream was vastly confused and delayed in its action, for dregs of the drugged punch still moved sluggishly in his blood.

Now he and Peter were in his London lodgings, flat on the carpet, and as his fingers gripped Peter's throat he heard the laughter of Kitty Trimmer. And now they were on the brick floor of a wine-shop in Kingston, and Peter's face was like a purple bladder. Now he was in the open boat, his fingers still pinched deep in Queery's throat—and Queery was dead.

He laughed in that lifeless, hideous mask, then loosed his cramped fingers and raised his own face to the sky. The stars were gone, and the whole arc of heaven was awash and pulsing with fearful, bright lights. Burnham rose to his feet and shouted to the flaming sky. And all around him the sea was like a sea of fire; and clean-cut against the red

and gold and orange of the waves cruised the black fin.

He stooped and grasped the body of the dead man with both hands. His strength was as a giant's strength; and he lifted the limp clay and flung it far out into the flaming sea. The black fin veered away from the splash. The body sank, then returned slowly to the surface and floated upon that flaring field, dark, shapeless, and inertly sinister.

It drifted in upon the boat. It bumped against the boat's side, ponderously, persistently. Burnham cursed it and pushed it off with an oar. It sank beneath the flaming sea at the thrust; it surged to the surface again, and again drifted boatward, wide-eyed, purple-faced, and thumped dully along the boat's starboard side.

Burnham cursed it again, and again attacked it with the oar; but it seemed to avoid the long blade, sluggishly but certainly. It struck upon the boat's thin planking with knee and hand and head. Burnham screamed curses at it—and the sound of his own screams awakened him.

He awoke with the horror of the dream still upon him. He lay on his back in the bottom of the boat. The stars had paled and the sky was like a pearl-gray shell. The white gull drifted into his line of vision on motionless wings, hung directly over him, and looked down with its red eyes. Then he remembered where he was, how he had come there, and what his fate was likely to be.

He was hungry, for he had been two nights and a day without food. He was thirsty. He was about to sit up and take the water-breaker in his hands when the sound that had haunted his dream came to his ears—the sound of something bumping softly along the side of the boat.

He scrambled to his knees with a gasp of terror, then remembered that the dead man had been only a thing of his dreaming. He looked straight down over the starboard gunwale and saw the long, vague shape of the shark at rest close beside him, not more than a foot beneath the brightening surface of the sea. His heart shook, for here was a sinister omen indeed; but with sudden fury he raised an oar

spearwise and plunged it straight down at the great fish. The blade struck, and the shark darted away, with a swirl of water that rocked the boat, into the watery gloom beyond.

James Burnham gazed slowly around him. The sun was not yet above the horizon, but the clear flame of it shone like a tide of molten glass between sea and sky. Above this clearest radiance lay a band of tenderest pink. The sea to the eastward sparkled and glowed with silver and gold and rose.

To the southeast, and not more than three miles away, the swelling sails of a little brig blushed like the petals of a pink rose. Her hull, transfigured by the morning gleam, transfused with the shimmering of wave and air, glowed upon the seas like an opal.

The whole scene was a picture fit for a child's wonder-book; and it was hard to believe that this same sky had glowered wide with naked heat but a few short hours before, that the fanged shark swam and waited under that marvelous glimmer

and gleam, that coffee was even now being brewed in the galley of that fairy bark for the consumption of hairy-handed, foul-mouthed fellows in tarry breeks.

It was hard to believe; but the castaway knew that it was so. Best of all, to him, was the thought of the coffee and stale bread aboard the brig. He stood at gaze until his eyes convinced him that the vessel was heading his way. Then he turned, took up the little oaken breaker, pulled the plug with his teeth, and drank deep.

All the east now was awash with gold and rose. Burnham stood on a thwart and flapped the square of canvas several times at arm's length above his head. He sat down, manned the oars, and pulled in the brig's direction with all his strength. His strokes soon lagged and faltered, for he was weak with hunger.

The sun cleared the horizon, the sails of the brig lost their tints of rose and the hull its opalescent quality. The heavens shone blue from sea-rim to sea-rim.

James Burnham was taken aboard the brig, which proved to be an honest vessel from the New England town of Boston, bound for Barbados. The castaway sank upon the deck. There piping hot coffee and coarse sea fare from the galley were brought to him.

The master of the brig, an elderly, lean person with a goatish beard and a long, shaven upper lip, watched him eat and drink with calculating regard, and then questioned him. Burnham told the true story of his adventure with Peter Queery.

"Yer tale sounds likely enough, young man," said the shipmaster in a curiously high, whining voice. "The devilment that goes on up an' down this Atlantic sea, from Acadia in the north to Trinidad in the south, is an offense to heaven an' a stench i' the nostrils o' the Almighty. But yer life has been spared to 'e, young man, a' ye'd do well to dedicate it to the Lord. I kin see by the cast o' yer countenance an' the slant o' yer eye that ye've bin bred in ungodliness, roistering, an' high-bellied living; and yet yer tainted life was spared to 'e. Better men,

godly men, true sarvants o' the Lord, hev not bin so fortunate. There was Cap'n Moses Smith, my own blood-brother, a constant reader an' digester o' the Good Book, set sail a year back come January, from Jamaicy, with a cargo o' red rum an' black negroes, an' hain't never bin heerd of nor seen since. Overhauled an' scuttled by the pirates he was, ye kin lay to it. Deck or Hicks or the Frenchman got him, hull, crew, an' cargo, an' his own saintly life into the bargain. Ye're lucky, my young friend, to be a settin' here now with yer worthless life still aglow in yer belly!"

Throughout this lengthy homily James Burnham had sprawled on the deck, with his shoulders to the bulwarks, and regarded the pious shipmaster with dancing eyes and a crooked smile.

"Thank you," he said. "What suggestions have you to make as to the best way for me to begin to dedicate my life to the Lord?"

Mr. Smith pulled his goatish beard and reflected. He spat tobacco-juice into the scuppers.

"Ye'd best set to work a showin' yer gratitude

to the human instrument o' yer release from death by thirst an' starvation," he said. "Two days out o' Boston we lost a poor sinner overboard. In that I see the hand o' Providence, young man. Ye kin take his berth an' help us work the brig down to Barbados."

A shadow as of speculation crossed Mr. Burnham's glinting gaze. He contemplated the shipmaster with an open sneer of suspicion, for he had already gathered enough knowledge of these western waters to lead him to suspect that a penniless and friendless white man here, be he gentle or simple, need look for neither charity nor justice.

In his mind's eye he saw himself being sold by the shipmaster to some unconcerned planter in Barbados. So he stared sneeringly and questioningly at Mr. Smith until the glance of that worthy wavered and fell.

"Barbados will suit me to a wish," he said, "for I doubt not that my friend, Mr. Angus McLatchy, of Kingston, has an agent or correspondent in that island."

Smith fingered his beard and treated the castaway to a sharp but fleeting glance.

"Like enough," he said. "Like enough; but what proof can ye show that same agent or correspondent that ye're a friend o' Mr. Angus McLatchy? I'm thinkin', young man, he'll want more than yer word for it."

"I have the proof," replied James Burnham easily; but in his heart he knew that the mark on his shoulder would count for nothing among strangers.

During the remaining hours of that day Burnham was permitted to idle about the brig's main-deck and sit or lie in such patches of shade as happened to take his fancy. When he was thirsty he went to the open water-butt which lay lashed to the bulwarks, amidships on the starboard side, and drank his fill. At meal-times, receiving no invitation to the cabin, he went to the galley and ate whatever coarse fare was passed out to him by the cook.

At such times he exchanged a few words with

two or three of the members of the crew. He asked no questions, however, and none was asked of him. The rough and dejected-looking fellows eyed him curiously, even suspiciously.

III

WHEN night fell James Burnham felt sufficiently revived in body and spirit to assert himself. He ascended the short ladder which led to the circumscribed poop-deck and accosted the shipmaster, who was lounging against the larboard rail with a pipe between his teeth.

"I find you remiss in hospitality, and must ask you for tobacco, a pipe in which to smoke it, and some definite information as to the whereabouts of my berth," he said coolly.

A string of rattling oaths flew from the shipmaster, and he sprang from the support of the low rail straight at Burnham's throat. The castaway stepped nimbly aside and shot out his right foot, and the New Englander stumbled across the narrow deck and came in sharp contact with the starboard rail.

He turned, however, quick as a cat, and sprang again at the friendless castaway. Again Burnham

stepped aside a fraction of a second before the instant of collision, and again he used his artful foot to advantage. This time Smith measured his full length upon the planking. Burnham laughed dangerously, and decided in a flash that he would meet the next attack with his fist instead of his foot.

Smith scrambled up with a splutter of oaths, and at that moment Mr. Winch, the mate, who had left the cabin by way of the after-companion, smote Burnham on the back of the head with a belaying-pin.

When Burnham recovered consciousness it was to find himself in the brig's forecastle, alone, ironed, and sprawled in a corner. His head, neck and shoulders ached dully, and the back of his skull was as tender as a boil. His stomach was heavy and his mouth was dry.

The stagnant air of the forecastle stank of dead tobacco-smoke, of bilge, of soiled garments and humanity. This dismal apartment was below the level of the deck and slam in the brig's bows, and such light and ventilation as it could boast were sup-

plied by one small hatch. Now the sunshine flooded straight down the open hatch.

Burnham stared fixedly at the bolt of sunshine and remembered everything that had happened to him up to the time of the blow on the head. He surmised, correctly enough, that the blow had been delivered by one of the brig's officers.

He looked around for some means of quenching his thirst, but could see nothing in the forecastle that promised relief. He turned his attention to his irons. He was shackled at the ankles only, and was not chained to the deck or frame of the brig.

He crawled to the foot of the ladder which led up to the open hatch and was about to ascend it when a shadow fell upon the rounds above him. He looked up, at the same time shrinking aside from the foot of the ladder, and saw a small, ragged figure slip over the coaming of the hatch and commence a slow and halting descent.

The visitor was Henry Todd, the ship's boy. Burnham had noticed him about the deck the day before—a skulking, frightened lad of fifteen or six-

teen years, thin and colorless, and bruised about the face and naked shins. He had been interested in this forlorn creature, but had felt no pity. Suffering never inspired pity in James Burnham's breast. He had seen the lad flinch at a word from the black cook, cringe at a glance from the shipmaster, and start in terror at a curse from one of the mates; and so, in a spirit of contrariness, he had spoken cheerily to the terrified youngster.

Todd turned at the foot of the ladder, stared at Burnham for a second or two without a sound, then thrust a bottle into his hands. Next moment he was gone up the ladder and through the hatch.

"It would seem that I have a friend aboard this accursed tub," said Burnham. "A whipped dog of a friend, to be sure—but of some use, perhaps. It is wonderful what a kind word will do! What a blessing it is to be possessed with a tender and genial disposition!"

He sneered, removed the cork from the bottle, and sniffed at the neck. Then he raised the bottle and took a few drops cautiously on his tongue. It

was a weak but refreshing mixture of rum and water.

His mouth and throat were dry, and his tongue was like leather. He tilted the bottle again and drank deep. He hid the precious bottle in a nook beside the heel of the bowsprit and returned to the corner in which he had found himself upon first recovering consciousness. He sprawled limply, closed his aching eyes, and thought hard in spite of the throbbing of his head.

A second visitor came to the suffocating forecastle an hour later, and this was the shipmaster himself.

"So there ye lay, ye mutinous dog!" said the New Englander.

Burnham opened one eye languidly and groaned.

"How d'ye fancy yer berth?" queried the other, grinning dryly.

Burnham closed his eye and sprawled more limply than before. The shipmaster stirred him briskly with the toe of his boot, but failed to excite any response. He went to the foot of the ladder and

bawled for Mr. Winch, the first mate. Winch looked through the hatch and was told to fetch down a bottle of liquor. He soon arrived with a bottle of brandy. He, too, stirred the limp form of Burnham with an inquiring toe.

"Leave the dog lay," he suggested. "He's purty nigh gone, anyhow."

"Fetch him round," said the shipmaster. "Put a gill or two o' that there liquor into him. He ain't worth a penny dead, afloat, or ashore; but if we land him alive an' in good heart he's worth thirty guineas out o' any planter's pocket.

"If we kin make one o' these here pirate captains out o' him, we'll git the reward from the governor, an' see him hanged into the bargain!"

"Ye're a deep one," said Winch, with admiration in his voice.

"An' how d'ye know he ain't a pirate?" replied Smith. "Looks like one, don't he? Picked up adrift in a open boat, wasn't he—an' ain't that what all these here pirate crews does to their captains when they wanter git quit o' them?"

"Ye got a figgerhead on ye, an' no mistake," responded the mate. "An' jist which one o' these here pirates will ye make o' him? He don't talk like a Frenchy, and Major Deck's a fat man, so I've bin told by them as have saw him."

"This is Hellfire Hicks," said the other promptly. "There's a reward o' two hundred pounds for him alive an' one hundred dead."

So brandy was forced generously between Burnham's teeth. Later he was fed with cabin fare. He had the stifling forecastle to himself, for the crew had deserted it for the deck the moment the brig had entered the sultry latitudes.

Young Henry Todd brought him his food. The poor lad was a sight to soften a heart of iron; but James Burnham felt nothing but a scornful interest in him.

"If they don't hang ye," whispered the boy, "will ye git me a berth aboard a pirate ship? I git starved here, an' I git kicked. Let me be a pirate, sir, so's some day I kin lay this old devil's tub aboard an' see the cap'n an' Winch an' the cook

walk the plank an' sink into the everlastin' sea! I'll help ye git away, Cap'n Hicks, sir. When we git nigh some land I'll victual a boat."

Burnham eyed him with a slanting, quizzical glance.

"So you would ship with a pirate, would you, my lad?" he said.

Todd assured him that he would, and gladly, though his parents had been honest folk and he had been brought up to read in the Bible every day. He would carry rum for any pirate afloat, he said, and clean their knives and load their pistols and swab up the bloody decks—anything, in fact, rather than continue to serve in the brig *Virtue,* with Captain Smith, Mr. Winch, and Sam, the black cook.

Two days later Henry Todd brought word to Burnham that the green hills of St. Kitts were in sight, and that the master expected to make the little island of Nevis some time during the following day.

"And where is it they intend to sell my neck for a reward?" asked Burnham.

"In Nevis," replied the boy; "to the governor of Nevis. An' if they can't make a pirate of ye, they'll sell ye to a planter."

"In that case we had better try to get ashore in St. Kitts, though I don't know if it is held by the French or the English just now. Do your best about the boat, lad, and give me a call when it is ready. Water, biscuits, a sail, and oars we must have, and if you can get hold of a musket or a brace of pistols, with powder and ball, so much the better."

The night fell dark, with clouds between the sea and the stars. It was long after midnight when Todd returned to the sweltering forecastle and crept to Burnham's side.

"All's ready," he whispered, "an' everythin's black as pitch. The boat's over the starboard side, amidships. Follow me, cap'n. Lay a hand on my shirt. Not a sound, for the love o' Heaven!"

They went up the ladder as soundless as ghosts, the boy in the lead. Truly the night was as black as pitch. Nothing was to be seen but the glimmer-

ing and vanishing of the phosphorescent seas overside and the red glow of a lamp aft at the binnacle. Clear of the forecastle hatch, Burnham laid his left hand on the lad's thin shoulder. In his right hand he held a heavy glass bottle by the neck.

They moved along slowly, step for step, noiseless in their naked feet, avoiding sleeping men asprawl on the deck underfoot and sleeping men in hammocks slung beneath the life-boats overhead. Burnham turned his head once and saw the red spark of the lookout's pipe. They reached the starboard bulwarks and moved cautiously aft until Henry Todd's groping hand encountered the rope by which the boat was made fast.

"Here it is," he whispered, with a sob of relief in his voice.

At the same moment some one grunted at their very feet; some one scrambled to his legs, grumbling heavily, and touched Burnham's breast with a fumbling hand.

The blood went through Burnham's veins like spurting flame. He raised his left hand from the

shoulder of the terrified boy and thrust it out gently, palm to the front. It came into contact with a bearded face. So he judged the exact position of the sleepy sailor's head. He swung the bottle and brought it down. It splintered, and the mariner sank to the deck with a faint sigh.

Naked feet pattered on the deck.

"Over you go!" whispered Burnham into the boy's ear.

Todd slid over the broad rail and went down the rope like a monkey. Burnham followed him quicker than it can be told, cast off the painter, snatched up an oar, and pushed away from the brig's side.

A voice hailed them. Burnham stumbled over the crouching lad, cursed him, found a second oar, and commenced pulling desperately away into the dark. Todd lay whimpering in the bottom of the boat between the thwarts.

A light flared upon the bulwarks, throwing blood-red stains upon the sides of the little waves. Burnham silenced the lad with an oath. In the san-

guinary illumination of the torch the two in the boat saw faces and shoulders lining the brig's side, but the light did not extend to the boat.

A musket was fired blindly. Burnham pulled several more strong strokes, then rested on his oars.

"Did you put any sort of firearms aboard?" he asked.

For answer the lad Todd thrust a musket into his hands and whispered to him that it was loaded. Burnham obtained the powder-flask and primed the pan. He drew the oars inboard, brought the musket to his shoulder, and fired deliberately at the core of torchlight on the brig's rail.

The light fell, and a scream rang across the rocking water. Burnham laughed guardedly, laid the weapon aside, and fell to rowing again. Ten minutes later he stepped the mast and set the little sail.

When dawn broke James Burnham beheld a green island lying within a distance of three miles to starboard, and more distant islands like cloudy pearls

upon the brightening sea. The brig was nowhere in sight, and for this he thanked his stars.

He awoke Henry Todd, gave him the tiller for a little while, and employed his brief leisure in eating ship's biscuit and drinking stale water. Refreshed, he took the tiller again and let the lad eat and drink.

The island developed before them momentarily. The boy gazed eagerly forward at the climbing forests of green, at the low white surf riding in to the lilac sands, at the slender cocoanut-trees between the sea and the forests. He turned and gazed at Burnham with awe and admiration in his doglike eyes. There was a fine color in his wasted cheeks.

"Praise be to Heaven we're clear o' the brig *Virtue!*" he cried. "An' ye'll let me be a pirate with ye, sir? Ye give me yer word on it, cap'n. I got ye the boat, sir, an' never a hitch."

"What's all this talk about a pirate, you fool?" exclaimed the man, bending a terrific glance upon poor Todd. "I am no more a pirate than you are. My name is Burnham, James Burnham."

"Yes, sir," whined the lad, cringing.

They beached the boat and went ashore to spy out the country. Todd recognized nothing that he saw, for, though he had sailed two voyages to the West Indies, he had never had so much as an hour of shoreleave on any island.

Burnham was at his wit's end for a plan of campaign. He devoted an hour to a cautious inspection of his immediate surroundings. He knew nothing of his whereabouts and could only suppose that he was somewhere on the windward coast of St. Kitts. He was without money. His garb was of the scantiest, for on the night of the robbery he had sat up to the bowl of punch in nothing more than shirt, breeches, silk stockings, and shoes, for comfort's sake. His stockings and buckled shoes had been taken from him before he had been set adrift. Now his shirt of fine linen was grievously torn and soiled, and his breeches had suffered from the dust and splinters of the brig's forecastle.

His lip, chin, and cheeks, which he had kept smooth as glass under civilized conditions, were

now stubbly with a growth of several days. He fingered this growth discontentedly as he crossed the beach. At the edge of the whitewood grove he turned to Henry Todd.

"Have you a knife?" he asked—"a sharp one?" The boy shrank away from him, with terror in his humble eyes.

Burnham laughed.

"You poor fool!" he exclaimed. "Do you think I want to cut your throat? Perhaps you still think I am Hellfire Hicks. I have told you that my name is James Burnham. I am James Burnham, an unfortunate gentleman, and the son of a baronet. Now, then, have you a knife?"

Todd produced a large case-knife from a pocket of his canvas trousers. Holding it in his hand, he eyed Burnham timidly.

"If ye ain't a pirate," he whined, "what's to become o' me? What will I do for a berth? An' how'll I ever settle my score with Cap'n Smith an' Mr. Winch?"

Burnham laughed softly, and his dangerous eyes

twinkled quite kindly. Circumstances were making something of an actor of him.

"If we ever get out of this corner, you'll never lack for a berth," he replied. "And now we'll breakfast again under these trees. Give me the knife and fetch up the best of the provisions. We can't be many miles from a house or plantation of some sort, or more than two days' journey from a port, at the worst."

"I stole this here knife from Mr. Winch," said the boy, passing it over.

Among the provisions which the lad carried up from the boat to the grove was a little crock of butter. After the second breakfast Burnham smeared some of this butter over his face and set to shaving himself with Mr. Winch's big knife. The knife was a fine piece of cutlery, with an edge like a razor's, and Burnham made a successful job of the operation. He had a deal of trouble in removing the butter, however, and was forced to scrub his face a dozen times with sea-water and sand.

By this time the sun was high and hot. The breeze from the open sea had scarce strength enough to win across the sands to the shade at the edge of the grove of whitewood trees. Yellowish-gray crabs scuttled about on all sides among the gray roots of the grove. Burnham sat with the open case-knife in his hand, deep in grim meditation. Henry Todd lay full length on the sand and fell asleep.

From where Burnham sat in the shade he had a clear view of the gently curving beach for several hundred yards to right and left. He raised his eyes every now and again and scanned the glaring sea in front and the beach on either hand with a baffled, desperate glance.

A figure appeared around the point on Burnham's right and approached wearily and unsteadily. As it drew nearer he saw that it was a woman.

IV

THE stranger was white and young. Burnham's keen eyes told him so while she was yet a long way off. She was hatless, and her brown hair was tumbled about her drooping shoulders.

She was dressed in white, with a long skirt, and in one gloved hand she carried a wisp of a whip. She walked as if the sands dragged backward at her heels; the watcher saw that she was booted, and caught the glint of sunlight on her spurs.

Just as Burnham rose to meet her she reeled, fell, and lay motionless on the sand.

"Here's a guide for me, as I live!" exclaimed Burnham.

He left the shade of the grove and went swiftly along the beach to the prostrate woman. The hot sand scorched the soles of his naked feet.

She lay face downward, and he stooped and laid a hand on one of her slender shoulders. She did

not move, and so he knew that she had swooned. He saw that one side of her white skirt was soiled with red earth, and guessed that she had met with an accident while riding. The handle of her little whip was of solid gold; therefore she must be a person of considerable importance in the island. His face cleared and his eyes brightened with satisfaction.

He knelt, raised her limp form gently with his right arm across her breast, and turned her so that he could see her face. He saw that she was young and attractive, though of a startling pallor.

Her eyes were closed, and she seemed not to breathe at all. A thin trail of blood moved slowly upon her white forehead from a small, bruised cut.

Burnham pressed a hand against her left side and felt the faint stirring of her heart. He was mightily relieved at that, but for his own sake rather than for the lady's. He lifted her bodily and carried her to his resting-place in the edge of the white-wood grove, where Henry Todd continued to slumber heavily.

Burnham lowered the unconscious young woman to the sand and bathed her face and hands with the water from the brig. He had no spirits to administer, but she opened her eyes at last and looked up at him with a vague inquiry in her gaze.

Her eyes were as deep and blue as the sea, with lights of amber and dark green in their cool depths. He returned her unwavering gaze steadily and cheerily. She sighed, and her lids fluttered and closed.

"Turk threw me," she whispered. "Where am I—and who are you?"

"You are safe," he answered gently. "I found you fallen on the beach, unconscious, but a few minutes ago. I am a stranger in St. Kitts; but if you can tell me where you live I shall give myself the honor of taking you to your home."

She opened her eyes again for a second.

"This is not St. Kitts," she said. "It is the island of Nevis, and I am the governor's daughter. Will you be so kind—as to take me—to——"

Her voice faded into silence, as if from utter weariness.

At the mention of Nevis Burnham felt despair for a moment, and showed something of it in his face. In the darkness he had sailed toward the wrong island, and now it might be that he was no more than a few miles distant from Smith and Winch and the detested New England brig from which he had made such a violent escape.

To bring himself in touch with the governor would mean to come in touch with the chief port of the island, and this would mean, past a doubt, the risk of an encounter with Captain Smith. It was in this island that Smith had planned to sell him, either as a pirate or a slave.

How was the truth of his story of robbery and misfortune to be proved to the authorities? The violence of his escape from the brig *Virtue* would tell against him, he supposed. He had brained one man with a bottle and shot another.

"But it has to be risked," he murmured, glancing down at the girl with a calculating eye. "The

game's yet to be played, and here in my hand is the card with which it must be won!"

The girl's head, with its loosened mass of bright brown hair, was against his left shoulder. He gazed into her pale face with inscrutable eyes. Her eyes were closed. He glanced at the slumbering Todd, then put out his foot and roughly prodded the lad in the ribs.

"Fetch the rest of the water from the boat," he ordered.

Todd awoke with a start, sprang to his feet, and uttered a cry of astonishment at sight of the young woman.

"Get the water," said Burnham, "and be quick about it!"

Ten minutes later the girl sat up, then got unsteadily to her feet. Her hair and face were dripping with the water which Burnham had poured over her with an unstinting hand. A delicate flame sprang alight in her cheeks. Burnham was upright on the instant. He bowed low, with modest eyes and an engaging smile.

"I am at your service, madam," he said. "If you will tell me the road to your father's house, I will do my utmost to get you there safely. You are too weak to stand. Sit down again, I beg of you, and rest a little longer. I regret vastly that I can offer you no better refreshment than this stale water."

The governor's daughter sat down and leaned against the bole of a tree. She looked from Burnham to the lad, and back to Burnham, with frank curiosity and not a little suspicion in her glance. Her eyes were darker and finer than the castaway had at first thought them; and they were fearless and honest.

"Who are you?" she asked. "And what manner of man are you, to be here on this beach, in rags, and yet with all the words and graces of a gentleman?"

James Burnham bowed again, and smiled.

"I thank you from the depths of my heart," he said. "The truth is, I am a gentleman, and for the moment in a very critical situation. But let

my unfortunate story wait until you are safely restored to the arms of your family. Is Government House to the left or the right, and how far away is it?"

The young woman looked all around her and studied the curving beach. She raised a hand to the small cut and angry bruise high up on her white forehead. Todd stood and gaped at her in wonder.

"To the left," she said, "and fully four miles away. I do not know of any road from here other than the sea beach. I was inland—I know not how far—when my horse threw me. I made my way through the jungle to the sea, and I remember vaguely walking upon the hot sand as one walks in a nightmare. And then I must have fallen."

"It was when you fell that I first saw you," replied Burnham in a soothing voice. "You were unconscious when I went to you. Thank God that my seeming misfortunes threw me upon this shore! But to return to the matter in hand, madam. Is the residence of your father near any harbor?"

"It stands above the harbor of Charles Town," she replied, her glance, full of curiosity and pity, dwelling upon the man's torn shirt of fine linen.

She took note of his shaven cheeks, and of the fact that his strong and shapely hands were clean and unblemished; also the fact that he had made no apologies for his shabby and scanty attire did not escape her. Any other than a man of breeding, she reflected, would have made all haste to explain the condition of his linen and the absence of stockings and shoes.

Though somewhat daunted by the prospect of entering Charles Town, in the harbor of which the brig *Virtue* doubtless rode at anchor, Burnham let no sign of uncertainty or dismay touch his face. He turned slightly and pointed across the shimmering sand to the little white boat.

"I think you will find it more comfortable to make the journey by water than by land," he said. "We can rig you an awning of the sail, and the lad and I can row the boat."

"By water!" she exclaimed in a startled voice.

The expression of her eyes changed, and the color fled from her cheeks. "Can we not go by land—on foot along the shore? I am strong enough to walk, sir, thanks to your good care of me."

Burnham saw that she was afraid to trust herself in the boat, away from land, with him. Did she fear that he would set his sail and make for St. Kitts with her? he wondered.

"As you wish," he said tenderly. "I was thinking only of your comfort. You have suffered greatly this morning. But I understand. You do not know me—and how should you? Henry, bring up the oars and sail from the boat and hide them somewhere in this grove. We must try to drag the boat up and hide her, too. We may need her again. And we must collect our poor provisions and stow them away in some place of safety. I must ask you to excuse me, madam, while I help the lad."

"I'll go with you in the boat!" cried the young woman, her face aflame. "And I—beg your pardon most humbly."

"No, I beg of you," returned Burnham. "What right have I to expect your trust—an outcast upon your shore? But, if you care to trust me, then I thank you with all my heart. You are as brave as you are kind. Lad, collect the food and follow down to the boat. Bring along the musket."

The lady stood up again, and Burnham offered her his arm. She accepted it with a shy but ravishing smile of eyes and lips. After a few steps she winced slightly and leaned upon him heavily.

"I am tired, and my poor head spins," she sighed.

Burnham slipped an arm about her slender waist and almost carried her to the boat. At a word from him Todd pushed the boat into the sea, stern first. The white surf creamed about it, hissing and flashing; but the lad waded in and held it off the shore.

Then Burnham lifted the young woman in both arms, carried her out, and placed her in the boat, amidships. The provisions and musket were soon put aboard, and the little sail was rigged above the girl as an awning.

The boat was then swung around and run into deeper water. Burnham and the lad scrambled aboard and manned the oars.

They pulled toward Charles Town, at a distance from the shore of about half a mile. There was some briskness to the wind, but the heat from the downglaring heavens and upglaring sea was terrific. The governor's daughter dozed in the shade of the tented sail. The man and the boy breathed heavily as they pulled on the oars. The sweat hopped out on their skins and ran like quicksilver. Their eyes shrank from the encompassing shimmer and glow, and when they turned their faces to the island it rocked and swayed in their sight as if a giant of earthquake shouldered the bases of its green hills.

The lad Todd failed in his stroke. Burnham turned and glanced at him, and saw that he had sagged forward across the grip of the oar. An oath trembled on the man's lips; but he remembered the young woman in time to restrain it.

"Unship your oar and lie down, lad," he said kindly.

Todd obeyed; and Burnham possessed himself of the discarded oar and pulled double. He shot a glance beneath the awning at the young woman, to see whether or not his heroic and humane action had been noticed. Her eyes were wide open and fixed upon his face in a downright stare of admiration and commendation. He lowered his own glance modestly and pulled desperately at the heavy oars.

At last the boat crawled around a point of land and turned sluggishly into the little bay which formed the harbor of Charles Town. Burnham turned on his thwart and surveyed the place with anxious and calculating eyes.

He saw three vessels riding at their anchors there, and recognized one of them as the New England brig. The town itself, clustered close to the gleaming tide at the back of the harbor, was not impressive. Its buildings were small and unbeautiful, some of sun-grayed, unpainted wood and some of pink-washed stone.

But behind the town sloped the wooded hills, and

here and there through the tropical foliage shone the white façade or wide roof of some imposing mansion. The green crests of royal palms standing high above the surrounding growths marked the lines and curves of hidden drives and avenues. A spot of wind-flapped red against the green marked the position of Government House.

The governor's daughter sat up beneath the awning and glanced around the harbor.

"There is no need of landing at the jetty," she said. "If you pull ashore right here, sir, on your left—by that crooked cocoanut tree—I can find a short road up to the house."

She pointed, and Burnham obeyed on the instant by swinging the boat's head to the left and pulling for the shore with renewed vigor. The change of course relieved him vastly; but still he was closer to the *Virtue* than he cared to be.

As he bent to the oars and drove the little boat smartly shoreward he kept his eyes upon the brig at the back of the harbor. The keel touched the sand at the foot of the cocoanut tree, and at the

same moment a boat appeared around the stern of the *Virtue* and approached at racing speed to the urge of six wet blades.

Burnham snatched his oars inboard, jumped over the gunwale into the warm and shallow water, seized the young woman in his arms, and dashed ashore. As he ran across the strip of sand the report of a musket rang out from the approaching boat and a ball whined low over his head. Todd whimpered and sprang past the others into the edge of the woods.

"Who fired?" asked the girl. "What is it? Why do you run?"

"It is a long story," replied Burnham, smiling. "I will tell it later—when you are out of danger. Is this the right path?"

"Set me on my feet, so that I can see," she said.

He let her slip from his arms. She glanced hastily around.

"This is the path," she said.

They ran up it, hand in hand; but she stumbled weakly before they had advanced fifty yards. With-

out a word he picked her up again and dashed ahead. She uttered no protest.

The path twisted upward through the woods. The governor's daughter was of no great weight; but, what with the heat of the day and his recent exertions at the oars, Burnham soon began to show signs of acute fatigue.

Still he struggled onward, holding the girl tight to his heaving breast. She gazed up into his strained and glowing face with anxious eyes.

"Put me down," she said, "you will kill yourself else! I am not in danger. They would not dare to hurt me, whoever they are."

Burnham knew that she spoke the truth; but he had no intention of deserting that which he had every reason to believe would prove his only means of escaping the revenge of the New England shipmaster. So he continued to hold her tight and to stagger onward.

Henry Todd appeared suddenly in the path in front, musket in hand. His face was colorless and his eyes flamed.

HE PICKED HER UP AND DASHED AHEAD

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"Go on, cap'n," he gasped. "I got this here weepon loaded an' primed, an' I'll let 'er off at the first feller what heaves in sight!"

Burnham nodded and continued his ascent of the jungle-flanked path. He stumbled once, but recovered himself with an effort which caused his face to twist with the agony of exhaustion. The young woman wrenched herself suddenly from his arms, put a hand beneath his elbow, and ran, supporting him at her side; but the pace was too brisk for him, in spite of her strong young arm, and he fell heavily in the trail and lay gasping.

She stood beside him and looked back. She saw the boy Todd, who had halted at a bend in the path, bring the musket to his shoulder. She could not see what he threatened. The thumping report rang out upon the stifling air, and the white smoke drifted slowly and clung in the foliage of the jungle.

The lad uttered a wild and exultant yell and came running up the path. The young woman heard footsteps behind her and turned to face her father.

Captain Algernon Nash, governor of Nevis, was past middle age and of impressive proportions. Running was not a favorite exercise of his. He was puffing desperately now and his round face was flaming. He had lost his hat, his wig sat upon his head at a rakish angle, and in each hand he brandished a large horse-pistol. Half a dozen servants, some black and some white, variously armed with cutlases, clubs, and pistols, crowded upon his heels.

"You, Elizabeth!" he cried. "Turk came home with an empty saddle, and I sent a score of men out to search for you. But who are these? And what is the meaning of the musket shots?"

The young woman put her arms about his neck.

"Turk threw me, this gentleman found me unconscious, and brought me home," she said, nodding toward Burnham. "He brought me to the harbor in a boat, and since landing we have been pursued and fired upon."

"Fired upon, *you!*" roared the governor. "Zounds, but some necks will be stretched for this!

Ha! here they come—and the sanctimonious Master Smith in the van, as I live!"

Burnham got to his bruised feet and bowed to Captain Nash just as Smith and his party came into sight around a kink in the trail. Henry Todd slunk behind Burnham and crouched there trembling.

"I have had the honor of doing your daughter a slight service, sir, and in return I must ask you to hear me fairly in reply to the charges which these unsavory fellows will presently make against me. This lad and I escaped from the New England brig last night," said Burnham in a labored voice.

The governor nodded and looked him over with hard eyes.

V

I HAVE already heard something of it," said the governor dryly. "You have done my daughter a slight service, have you? I am under obligations to Hellfire Hicks, am I? What is the world coming to? But you'll have a fair hearing, my man."

Burnham drew himself up with dignity, and his glance kindled upon the other; but he made no retort, for at that moment the party from the brig halted within a few yards of their quarry and Smith began to address the governor in a high, twanging voice.

"That's him, yer honor!" he cried, pointing at Burnham and wagging his goatish beard. "Aye, that's the pirate—that's Hicks. Come ashore to see one o' his wenches, did he? Undone through the lust o' the blood! So may all lustful men be brought to justice untempered by mercy! Bid her drop her consuming hand from yer honor's neck.

Clear yer eyes from the painted spell. Harden yer heart against the wiles o' the smirkin' she-devil!"

Elizabeth Nash straightened her slender, rounded form and dropped her arm from her father's neck. She still held the gold-headed whip in her right hand. Her face was like a red rose of the south and her eyes like two points of blue fire in the heart of an iceberg.

For half a second she stood thus, straight and trembling; and then she darted forward and lashed the New England shipmaster fair across the face with her whip twice, quick as lightning, with all the strength of her youth and fury.

Smith writhed, screamed an oath, then threw his arms around her. He tried to throw her, his face colorless as chalk save for the two livid welts across it.

While she swayed in his grasp, and before her father could raise his voice or a pistol, Burnham leaped upon them, seized the shipmaster's throat

with his right hand, and carried them both to the ground.

He clung to the man's throat. The girl rolled clear, scrambled to her feet, and darted back to her father.

The governor and his servants bestirred themselves just in the nick of time to save Burnham from the knives and clubbed muskets of the men from the brig. As it was, Burnham received a glancing slash on the shoulder which dyed his ragged shirt as red as the governor's face, but which failed to cause him to relax his grip on his enemy's windpipe.

The battle was brisk but brief. Captain Nash fought thunderously with his voice and his clubbed pistols; but it was owing to his official authority rather than to his physical prowess that the New Englanders lost heart so soon. Two of the brig's men turned tail and ran, and the others were overpowered and disarmed. Two of the governor's servants detached James Burnham from the limp and livid shipmaster.

What with righteous indignation and breathlessness, the governor was on the point of strangulation, and Elizabeth had subsided in a swoon immediately after her escape from Smith's infuriated embrace.

During the short journey to Government House, Burnham reeled at the governor's elbow. Though his brain whirled and his stomach quaked with fatigue and loss of blood, he was more than satisfied with the trend of the day's adventures. But, in spite of his contentment of mind and his amazing physical endurance, he fell unconscious within a few yards of the governor's door.

Burnham heard a voice, vast, vague, impersonal, yet insistent. It seemed to come to him through rolling fogs, from limitless voids of space. For ages he listened to it, mildly interested, unable and unanxious to detect any spoken word in it. He reflected, without apprehension or pleasure, that it was probably the voice of the Last Trump.

Doubtless it was because he lay at the bottom of the sea that the voice came to him in so vague and

dulled a tone. He felt the deep tides wash softly, yet mightily, across his breast; he felt the silt of the deep-sea bed creep and settle upon his motionless limbs.

The voice became less vague, less vast, more distinct, as if it reached him through shallower waters. And now it sounded almost human. Did it address itself particularly to him? Did it call him? He felt the fathoms of sea lighten on his breast and the silt of the sea floor slip away from his limbs.

He aroused himself and swam upward, upward, through black waters and brown, through green tide-bands and blue. At last he swam frantically, with bursting lungs.

He snatched for breath with a choking sob and opened his eyes. He lay on cool sheets and looked up at a while ceiling high above him. Two faces swam into view between his eyes and the distant ceiling—one that of a young man whom he had never seen before, the other that of the governor of Nevis.

Captain Nash's broad visage had lost much of

its explosive coloring, and the eyes had altered in expression until they were almost tender. Burnham gazed up blankly at the two faces for a few seconds, then suddenly remembered all.

"Thank God you've come around!" exclaimed Captain Nash. "I was beginning to fear that you had slipped away from us, my dear sir."

My dear sir! That sounded very pleasant and promising to the man on the bed. His brain became clear, and he thought swiftly. He lowered his lids, as if in the extremity of weakness and weariness; but in reality he distrusted his eyes and closed them to veil his thoughts. They were still closed when he asked, in a feeble voice, if the governor's daughter had escaped serious harm.

"She is recovering her strength and composure splendidly," replied Captain Nash. "She suffered no serious injury, either from her accident or the attack of that rogue Smith, thanks to you. She tells me that you named yourself to her as Burnham. Is this so?"

"It is my name," answered the other slowly and

weakly. "James Burnham, at your service. I am a Berkshire man—of the family of Burnham of Burnham."

"Say no more, my dear lad," replied the governor cordially. "Mr. Willis, who is a surgeon, says that you must not be questioned just now. I have heard of Sir Walter Burnham, of Burnham, and of his unusual custom of having all his offspring marked with the paternal crest; and I have seen your naked back. You are among friends, lad. Later, when you are stronger, you must tell us the story of the misadventures which threw you upon our shores in such desperate plight. Now swallow whatever mixture Mr. Willis gives you, clear your mind of worry, and try to sleep."

Burnham's eyelids fluttered, but they did not open.

"You are very kind," he said, "and I pray you to extend your kindness to the unfortunate lad Todd, who helped me escape from the New England brig. I know nothing of him except that he

was ill-used aboard the brig and befriended me in my grievous need."

"Spoken like a Christian and a gentleman!" exclaimed Nash. "Rest easy on the score of the lad Todd, my friend. He'll be well cared for, I promise you."

At this point the young surgeon ventured to pluck the governor by the sleeve and whisper a caution in his ear, and the two left the room. Mr. Willis was soon back, with a glass in his hand; and Burnham swallowed a long and bitter draft without so much as the breath of an oath. He even went so far as to thank the young surgeon humbly for his attentions.

"Don't mention it, sir, I beg of you," replied Mr. Willis. "I am proud to be of service to a gentleman of your courage and name."

James Burnham's wound was not a serious one, and Mr. Willis knew something of his profession. For three days the invalid lay in the big bed in the great, high-ceilinged, shaded room, and was

waited upon hand and foot by the governor, the doctor, and a host of servants.

On the morning of the fourth day, after the young surgeon had fixed him up among pillows in a big chair near one of the windows, the governor brought Elizabeth to call upon him, to pay her respects, and to hear the story of his adventures.

Elizabeth approached Burnham slowly across the polished floor, regarding him gravely, tenderly, steadily with her splendid eyes. Her clear cheeks were blooming with health and, perhaps, a little with the excitement of this meeting. The small wound on her forehead was hidden by a band of her hair.

Her portly father strutted and bowed beside her, evidently vastly pleased with himself and the two young people. He was as romantic as the slenderest ensign; and he was so well informed concerning the landed families of Berkshire that he had the name and rent roll of every one of the Burnham manors on the tip of his tongue.

Burnham met the young woman's gaze with a

nicely calculated expression of admiration and modest confusion in his eyes.

"Thank Heaven you have suffered no serious hurt!" he murmured.

She stood beside his chair, placed her right hand in his, and thanked him for his heroic services in a few shy and generous words. He bowed his head in silence, raised her hand a little, and pressed his lips to her cool fingers.

James Burnham's story was a long one, and the latter part of it contained much truth. From the time of his departure from Kingston with his false friend Queery to the moment of his seeing Elizabeth fall unconscious on the sand, he told his adventures as they had actually happened. He spoke modestly, though he raised the sum of the money which had been given to him by the baronet, and taken from him by Mr. Queery, from five hundred guineas to fifteen hundred guineas. There was no great harm in this, perhaps. A natural, youthful vanity and pride of place would account for a mild deception of the kind.

Furthermore, it appeared that he had encountered a great deal of difficulty in persuading his father to allow him to leave England and seek a career in the west. His first venture was lost, and his pride would not permit of his drawing again on his father within the year; but he had funds of his own, derived from the estate of a maternal great-aunt. He would send a letter to his agents by the next home-bound vessel. He would also communicate with his parents, though he was reluctant to cause them worry and anxiety with a tale of his misadventures; and so on, and so on.

"I shall be only too pleased to advance you whatever sum you may require while waiting for a reply from your agents," said the governor cordially. "I should do much more than that on either one of two counts. In the first place, I owe to you the life of my only child; in the second, you are a gentleman in sorry distress, and that through no fault of your own."

"I can see nothing of the nature of distress about my present circumstances," replied Burnham, smil-

ing from one to the other of his visitors. "If you can possibly consider my services to your daughter as the means of saving her life, then the consciousness of well-doing is all the reward I ask. In short, sir, I must refuse your very generous offer to advance me money. If you will be so gracious as to extend your hospitality to me until such time as I hear from England, and to make my condition known to a tailor, I shall not stand in any need of funds. And I shall be happy to assist you as a secretary, or in any capacity, during the period of awaiting a remittance from my agents."

Captain Nash wagged his head, but at the same time he looked pleased and vastly relieved. The fact is, he had feared that the young man would want to borrow a considerable sum of money. Though comfortably off, he was not wealthy; and he knew that even the most courageous and well-connected young bloods have, in time of plenty, a sad trick of forgetting the hands that have helped them in their day of want.

"As you will," he said. "We forgive you your

stiff-necked pride. Pride of that kidney is a quality I admire vastly. Look upon this house as your home for as long as you can put up with our quiet life, my boy. And I'll send a tailor to you within the hour. You'll need pocket money. Here is something that belongs to you."

He thrust a hand into a pocket and drew forth and counted out twenty-five golden guineas.

"They are yours," he continued. "They are your share of the fine which I, as chief magistrate and commander-in-chief of this island, laid upon Amos Smith, master of the brig *Virtue,* for imprisoning the person of a free subject of his majesty. Also, I cautioned him that if he ever came unfavorably to my notice again I would hang him like a pirate. The old fox got up his anchor an hour ago."

James Burnham was glad of the twenty-five guineas. Schemes took shape slowly in his brain. They were vague at first, but as he recovered strength he recovered self-assurance. Surely something was to be made, he reflected, of this very favorable situation in which chance had placed him.

Chance had done well for him, he admitted, but he saw that he could not leave his future entirely in the swift yet fumbling hands of that hysterical goddess. He studied the situation coolly, weighing and pondering in turn the adverse and the favorable conditions.

Against him were his empty pockets, his absolute lack of expectations, his hopeless estrangement from his family, and his shady reputation in England. For him, like high trump cards in an otherwise hopeless hand, were the governor and the governor's daughter—the grateful and generous old sailor, the grateful and romantic young woman.

He had won their gratitude and respect. Very well, then. He must make the most of this unfortunate state of affairs while it lasted—in other words, before any communication concerning him could reach the governor from England.

Burnham calculated that he would have three months, and perhaps more, of security and consideration in the island. Of course, he would not receive any money in reply to his letter to his ficti-

tious agents in London, and so would finally stand exposed before his new friends as a perverter of the truth, at least; but he had strength of mind enough not to let this thought worry him.

Three months are as useful as a year to a man of action. He was determined that, whatever his fortune might be at the time, he would be gone from Nevis before the end of three months. This being the case, he wrote to his father as well as to the nonexistent men of business.

Burnham's letter to his father was a masterpiece of impudence and fiction. He penned it with his tongue in his cheek and his eyes glinting with those impish and menacing cross lights which gave him that expression of sardonic squint for which he was later famous.

Both letters departed for England two weeks later, aboard a square-bowed merchantman. The governor sent a whole packet of mail, both official and private, by the same ship.

The social life of Nevis lacked much in extent but nothing in dash. Government House was the

hub of it, the governor its head, and Elizabeth Nash its heart. So James Burnham's position in society was an enviable one.

His position in the governor's house was all that a young man of pride and spirit could desire. Captain Nash treated him with consideration and affection, and took his arm whenever they walked abroad together. Elizabeth was his constant companion indoors and out. Early every morning they rode through the jungles and over the hills, or beside the sea, returning before the heat of the day.

At his own request James was allowed to assist the governor in his duties, sometimes as a deputy, sometimes as a secretary. The work was not arduous. Burnham inquired for Peter Queery, but the name was not known on the island.

There was an English regiment stationed in Nevis that had been out of England for almost a year, and it was with the officers of this regiment and the most prominent planters that Burnham associated when not in attendance upon the governor

or Elizabeth. By lucky play he increased his twenty-five guineas to one hundred.

So three weeks passed pleasantly and without accident, and Burnham studied Elizabeth Nash sedulously every day. At the end of the three weeks he was quite certain that she was in love with him. So he decided to win her, to marry her, before any possibility of his exposure. Once married to her, he would be safe from starvation, at the worst. A post of some sort would be found for him, and it would be to his father-in-law's interest to keep tight lips on the story of his past.

Burnham came to this decision late at night, and the first news that he heard next morning was that a frigate had but just let go her anchors in the roadstead.

With the assistance of his valet he made short work of an elaborate toilet. Within half an hour of joining the governor the commander of the frigate and a number of other officers arrived to pay their respects. Five of these callers belonged to a relief company of the Sixty-second Regiment,

which had come to strengthen the garrison of Nevis.

Burnham, standing straight, cool, and faultlessly attired at the governor's elbow, glanced over the assembled company and felt a sudden, paralyzing contraction of the heart. Young Mr. Stanton, whom he had cheated at cards in London, and who had taken Kitty Trimmer away from him, returned his horrified glance with very evident astonishment and displeasure.

So this was the end of it! James Burnham withdrew his gaze from the ensign's face and felt a sudden cold sweat spring out upon his skin.

VI

JAMES BURNHAM'S consternation upon beholding Mr. Percy Stanton was deep and acute, but the recovery of his amazing self-control was as quick as light.

His glance passed unconcernedly from the ensign's face, and again went lightly over the group of visitors. It finally came to rest on an open doorway beyond the officers, where flickering leaf shadows patterned flags of gray stone.

The formal greetings were soon finished. Burnham was introduced to several of the officers. All were invited to remain to the elaborate breakfast of that period and that country, which would be served at half-past ten o'clock.

The company broke into groups and pairs, laughing and chatting. The governor and young Willis moved among them, asking about the voyage, showing the way to seats, beckoning to footmen freighted with trays of tall glasses. Burnham as-

sisted in the duties of hospitality with a calm face and veiled eye. Close at his heels followed a black servant armed with cool drinks. He came at last to young Mr. Stanton, halted, and bowed low.

"Let me offer you a glass of this punch, sir," he said. "Rum, a dash of orange bitters, sugar, spring water, and a slice of green lime. Very good, I assure you. Cools the blood, quenches the thirst, and at the same time pleases the palate."

Stanton's checks flamed and he flared insolently.

"Mr. James Burnham, of Swan Alley, as I live!" he drawled.

"Say, rather, of Burnham in Berkshire," returned the older man softly. "But if I have the honor of your acquaintance, sir, it was likely enough come by during my brief and somewhat humiliating sojourn in Swan Alley. Yes, it could not have been at Burnham. You will forgive me, sir, I'm sure, that your name and the fact of our former acquaintance have slipped my memory."

The blood thickened in the ensign's smooth cheeks.

"So that's the line you take, is it?" he whispered hotly. "You don't know me, hey? 'Sblood, sir, I'll prick your failing memory for you! I'm one of the men you plucked in your own parlor in Swan Alley—with loaded dice. D'ye get that, my fine Mr. Burnham of Burnham?"

"I hear you," replied Burnham easily, with a slow smile on his lips and a flickering cross-gleam commencing to show in his gray eyes. "I hear you, and I don't like the porcine quality of your grunt. After breakfast, my fine fellow, I'll take much pleasure in showing you the beauties of his excellency's gardens. I know of a secluded spot much better suited than this room to the voicing of your ill-bred and unwarrantable assertions; and, if we each have a discreet friend in attendance, we'll do very nicely!"

"What?" exclaimed Stanton. "Am I invited to fight a common cheat?"

"You are invited to make less noise," retorted Burnham, smiling as if he were engaged in the most friendly conversation imaginable, but at the same

time thrusting his face within eight inches of that of the indignant ensign. "You are invited, most humbly, to make a mighty effort and try to behave like a person of breeding," he continued. "Of course, if your courage fails you, run to the governor for protection. Cry out that I cheated you in play—and then prove it. Aye, prove it! See if your word is better than mine on this island!"

Stanton trembled and lost color, and his glance shifted from James Burnham's terrific regard. To look into Burnham's eyes just then was to look into a hell of ice and white fire.

"I'll follow you to the garden," he stammered.

"After breakfast," said Burnham, laughing pleasantly. "And now I must insist on your trying a glass of this punch. Sam, the gentleman will drink—and I will join him in a glass. To our next meeting, sir!"

They both drank, Burnham with an ironical bow and a sardonic leer, young Stanton mechanically and hurriedly. Stanton was confused with shame and rage and something very much like fear.

It was of this emotion so closely resembling fear that he was ashamed. He wished this fellow Burnham to the lower regions; but he felt no very keen appetite for the task of sending him there. He wished heartily that he had kept a guard on his tongue.

At one and the same time he inwardly cursed his lack of discretion and his lack of courage. He was no coward—so he told himself, and it is unlikely that he could have found any other man to believe him—but the eyes of James Burnham played the mischief with his nerves, and always had. Why hadn't he left the fellow in peace? Why had he referred to that little matter of cheatery that had taken place so long ago in far-away London?

Miss Nash appeared, and her father's guests were presented to her. Soon after this all passed into another room, where a long table was set for a breakfast of even more than usual profusion.

The meal began with several choice varieties of fish and went on to turtle steak, to pepper-pot,

baked yams, roast fowl, curries, omelets, jellies, and fruits. Spirits and wines were served throughout the meal. Decanters and gilt-inscribed bottles stood honestly upon the white cloth, and something was within reach of every hand. In case the liquor which you particularly wanted happened to be more than the length of your arm away, all you had to do was to ask some one to push it along to you.

But few of the gentlemen patronized Elizabeth Nash's silver tea urn. Only James Burnham and the lady drank tea; and you must not think that Burnham drank it with any idea of pleasing the lady. His motive for avoiding the spirits and wines was not a tender or sentimental one. He was simply considering the steadiness of his eye and his hand, with a view to making a neat job of clipping Stanton's comb.

Gentlemen were expected to drink more than was good for them in those robust days, and in this matter they usually did what was expected of them. Mothers, wives, daughters, and sweethearts were not shocked unduly by flushed faces, thick voices,

and meandering feet. Every well-conditioned householder familiarized himself with the pattern of his dining-room carpet by frequent inspections of it at close range.

Burnham chatted agreeably with the men at his elbows, ate heartily, and drank three cups of tea. He smiled frequently at Elizabeth, and she never failed to meet his glance and return his smile. He showed an unruffled countenance to the company at large, but despair, chagrin, and even a vague sense of regret gnawed his heart.

Even if he could bring Stanton to a fight he would gain but little, for he knew that to kill his enemy would be to shatter his own fortune. He might wound the ensign; but how would that silence him?

He turned the matter over and over in his tortured mind and found it a grim riddle. At last he gave it up as hopeless and turned his attention to the conversation of two young men on his left.

"Percy means it," said one. "He is a fool about

her. He fairly forced Mrs. Black to bring her along as a companion—so the major says."

"Who wouldn't be?" replied the other. "A nymph, by the Lord Harry! I'd try my own luck there for the fact that I'm too poor to support a penniless wife. But Stanton has plenty of money and more coming to him. Daughter of a parson, isn't she?"

"That's what she says," replied the first speaker, "and Mrs. Black vouches for it. Percy's family won't like it, I'll swear, for they want him to marry into the nobility. You know, I suppose, that the founder of the Stanton fortune was a corset maker. That was Percy's grandfather. Wish my worthy grandsire had tried something of the kind!"

Burnham listened to all this with interest, wondering who the penniless charmer could be who had won such a hold upon Stanton's affections. He thought her a fool, whoever she might be. And then his mind went in search of some way of turning this information to his own advantage. Might he not silence Stanton by threatening to tell to this

new charmer the story of Kitty Trimmer? It was well worth considering.

In the mean time Percy Stanton had eaten little and drunk a great deal. He was not happy. The thought of the interview in the garden stuck in his crop like a bullet and refused to be washed down.

His hatred of James Burnham grew with the passing of every minute and the emptying of every glass. He could see no way of avoiding the fight. A condition of which Burnham was ignorant made it impossible for him to get to his feet and denounce the cheat to the assembled company.

The punch did not give him courage. At last he decided, confusedly, that he would eat his words rather than fight with Burnham. His courage continued to ebb and his mind to cloud. He would find out how much Burnham knew. He would come to an understanding with the fellow.

Burnham went to the garden alone, having decided not to force the ensign to a duel unless the threat to interview the new charmer should fail to silence him. He made his way to a secluded cor-

ner of the grounds and sat down on a stone bench in the shade of an almond tree. He was in a black mood. Was this chance of establishing himself in the world to be dashed from him by a cowardly, pie-faced simpleton like Percy Stanton?

Half an hour passed. He left the seat and paced the sanded paths. The heat was stifling. The temperature of his blood was choking. He moved toward the house and soon came in sight of the two young officers whose conversation he had overheard at the breakfast table. They greeted him with winks and laughter.

"Here's a pretty to do," said one. "The ladies have come ashore and gone into barracks, and the fair Kitty has sent Major Black's man over here with a note for Percy, summoning him to her side. But Percy is still sleeping under the breakfast table. A gay blade is Percy!"

Burnham laughed lightly.

"The heat was too much for him, I suppose," he said. "I must have him carried to my quarters and put decently to bed. These West Indian break-

fasts frequently prove too much for new arrivals. But—ah, you mentioned a fair Kitty. Mr. Stanton's wife, I suppose?"

"Not yet, though I am willing to bet two to one, in guineas, that she will be Mrs. Percy Stanton before we ever get back to England," replied the youth who had spoken before. "In the mean time she is Mistress Kitty Trimmer, lady-companion to the wife of our senior major. She is a beauty, sir, a beauty—and not worth a penny, I hear."

"Very romantic, I'm sure," said Burnham pleasantly. "I am glad to hear that Mr. Stanton can afford to be romantic. And now, gentlemen, if you will be so kind as to excuse me, I'll go and look after the disabled lover. If you want anything, shout for it. Some one will be sure to hear you, for the place is overrun with servants of all colors and shades."

Burnham hurried toward the house with an exultant smile upon his face.

"Very civil fellow," said one of the young bloods to the other.

"Yes; but there is something deuced queer about his eyes," replied the other. "I'd be sorry to get into an argument with him, stap me if I wouldn't! One of the Berkshire Burnhams, so old Nash tells me. He's got his queer eyes on the girl, that's my opinion."

Burnham found Stanton sitting up on the floor with a dazed and sullen expression on his face, his stock undone, and his head and uniform dripping with water. The servants had found him and, quite as a matter of course, administered the usual treatment for such cases.

It was evident that Stanton was the only one of the guests who had completely succumbed to the governor's hospitality. He looked at Burnham and scowled. Burnham bowed ironically.

"I no longer thirst for your blood, you'll doubtless be glad to hear," he said. "I hasten to congratulate you on your sweet romance. I never suspected you of such fidelity. I hear that Kitty is as charming as ever. You must convey my kindest

regards to her as soon as you recover command of your legs."

Mr. Stanton blinked, groaned, and swore.

"I am wondering," continued Burnham coolly, "if you did not make a mistake this morning. Is it possible that you ever met me and Kitty Trimmer when we lived together in Swan Alley? Think again, my dear sir; and give your whole mind to it. For the life of me, I can't recall ever having seen your face before—and it is not a face to be lightly forgotten."

Stanton glared at him in a dazed sort of way and groaned again.

"You should consider the lady's feelings, as you are so fond of her," continued Burnham, leering. "Live and let live is a good motto for gentlemen in your position. Come, bestir your wits and tell me if you and I—and Kitty—are to be friendly strangers—or what we used to be."

Stanton got unsteadily to his feet.

"They wouldn't believe you," he said dully.

"Nobody would listen to you. It would be two against one. You couldn't harm us."

Burnham laughed.

"Go talk it over with Kitty," he said. "She has a sharp brain. You are in no condition to think, even for yourself. Let me know your decision some time to-morrow, when you are sober."

Burnham retired to his room. Stanton rearranged his dress with fumbling fingers, wiped his face, found his hat, and stumbled away from Government House. He was directed to the barracks at the back of the town by an obliging negro, and in the course of time found his way to Major Black's quarters.

Mrs. Black was the first member of the household whom he happened to encounter. She was a large woman with a long, weather-beaten face and a small, calculating eye. Her usual manner with Percy Stanton was one of playful auntly affection; but just now she was far too deeply agitated to take the trouble to be either playful or affectionate. She grasped him by the arm.

"What's all this?" she exclaimed. "A nice position you have put me in—me, a decent woman and the daughter of an archdeacon! Did you get Kitty's note? What do you intend to do about it?"

Stanton stuck out his chest and frowned. He was not to be browbeaten by this grasping old woman, at any rate.

"What are you talking about?" he demanded.

"Talking about!" shrilled the lady. "Enough, in truth, to set this whole island agog! Enough to cause my venerable father to turn over in his grave! Oh, I was a fool to have anything to do with your low dissembling. Kitty—your young woman—has heard that a gentleman at Government House is an old acquaintance of hers. Now the cat is out of the bag with a vengeance, and I am in everlasting disgrace."

"You have been handsomely paid for whatever risk you have taken," retorted the ensign with a sneer. "You have bled me, and that's the truth, you old harridan, stap me else. As for this former acquaintance of Kitty's, this gentleman at Govern-

ment House—bah, I care no more for him than I do for your venerable papa in the village churchyard. I have already met him. Your delicate reputation has nothing to fear from him, I assure you. But where is Kitty? Take me to her."

"You have met him?" cried Mrs. Black. "And you have no fear of what he knows? And yet Kitty has confessed to me that he knew her in Wantage, where she was the——"

"What's that?" roared Stanton, laying violent hold of the woman's plump shoulders. "What lie is this you have frightened out of her?"

Mrs. Black was cowed. The color dropped from her long face.

"She—she said that her father is the tailor of Wantage, and—and this gentleman is a son of Sir Walter Burnham, of Burnham," stammered the woman.

"Is that all?" exclaimed Stanton. "Well, what of that? This James Burnham knows me, too—and I know him. He'll keep his mouth shut about the tailor of Wantage, I promise you! All that you

have to do, madam, is to keep *your* mouth shut, too."

With that he shook the wife of his senior major, then left her in tears of relief and general nervous agitation, and strode off in search of his Kitty. He found her at last, crouched upon the floor in the corridor of an empty room, with her face hidden in her hands. Tears glistened between her white and tapering fingers. Her bright and luxuriant hair, as soft as silk and as rich in tone as the straw of ripe wheat, had escaped from its braids and ribbons and now cascaded across her pliant, quaking shoulders and over her pulsing bosom. She was small, slender, delicately rounded from crown to heel.

Stanton knelt beside her and lifted her in both arms until her small head rested upon his right shoulder and her wonderful tresses streamed over his bright tunic. He loved her. She was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, according to his own standards of beauty. At that time his infatuation for her was stronger than his passion for play

and wine. Such manliness as he had been born the possessor of had not yet been dissipated by stupid and vicious living.

He tried to comfort her, kissing her wet cheeks and eyelids and whispering into her shell-like ear that she had nothing to fear from James Burnham. He assured her that he had Burnham completely silenced and in his power, that Burnham could as ill afford to refer to the past as she could.

Kitty ceased weeping and sighed. She opened her blue eyes, slipped her tender arms about her lover's neck, and thanked him with a kiss.

The shadows were long in the narrow streets and painted gardens and a cool breeze fanned in from the sea. James Burnham sat in the rose garden with Elizabeth Nash and read aloud to her from a book of verses.

VII

STANTON arranged a secret meeting with James Burnham for that same night. They met on a white track above the town, several hours after midnight, by the light of a belated and reduced moon and a million white stars. The long streamers of sugar-cane and bananas whispered around them in the cool sea breeze.

Both men had been sitting late with roistering companions. The ensign showed it in his flushed face and slightly deranged costume; but he was sober. Burnham was cool, mentally and physically. He was all in white linen and silk, and looked a notable dandy of original ideas. He carried a long walking cane of amber-colored glass and smoked a long pipe. Under the whimsical half lights of the stars and the old moon he cut an exceedingly romantic and attractive figure.

"Is it live and let live?" he asked quietly. "Or

is it to remember and make an unseemly disturbance in this peaceful spot?"

"Live and let live," replied Stanton breathlessly. "Forget the past, and act as if we had never known each other before."

"Very good! I am glad to see that you have come to your senses and that I am not compelled to put you out of the way," returned Burnham. "I give you my word that I shall stand by my part of the agreement so long as you keep faith as to yours. We need not shake hands on it, I think; and I tell you now that, whatever degree of friendship I may pretend to feel toward you in the future, I don't like you."

"And I don't like you, Heaven knows!" retorted the ensign. "But I'll keep faith with you, I swear."

Burnham went back to Government House, went to bed, and slept soundly. Stanton went back to barracks, found three kindred souls still busy with the dice, and joined them. He was already a confirmed gambler. He played until sunrise with better fortune than was usual with him.

A dozen men and women went for an early morning canter along the firm sands beside the sea. These rides were a favorite form of amusement with the governing classes of the islands—with the high officials, the naval and military officers, and the wealthy planters.

Major Black was there, accompanied by his wife and Miss Kitty Trimmer. Elizabeth Nash and James Burnham were also present. Mr. Stanton lay at home, sunk seventy fathoms deep in thick and heavy slumber.

Miss Nash and Mr. Burnham led the way for the first half mile, exchanging few words, and those absolutely commonplace, and many glances. The lady—bless her pure and tender heart!—had been born a mistress of the art of the eye. She had never cultivated it, to her knowledge, until recently.

No other man had ever interested her as James Burnham did. I think she was half in love with him by this time—she who had never before loved any man but her own father.

The romantic circumstances of her first meeting with Burnham had a great deal to do with the tender quality of her emotions toward him. He had inspired gratitude and admiration in her heart during the first hours of their acquaintance. His respectful, almost devotional attitude since his illness had appealed to her strongly.

A better man than James Burnham might have ventured all and won all in a day with her; but James Burnham would have lost all. He had played the game so far with amazing delicacy and understanding of the girl's nature and his own; and now he rode at her stirrup and wondered if he dared risk the final throw.

He turned slightly in his saddle and looked at her fairly; and her eyes came to his on the instant, the white lids drooping in a tender and veiled regard. His own gaze softened; something like remorse moved feebly within him, and his cool blood jumped briskly with admiration. He was about to speak when two riders passed at a hand gallop, the

long skirt of one of them brushing his near stirrup. A tinkle of familiar laughter rang in his ears.

Burnham looked ahead and beheld Kitty Trimmer's graceful back and the gleam of her harvest-ripe hair beneath the jaunty slant of a wide, plumed hat. Where had the tailor's daughter learned that trick of wearing a hat so that a man's pulses quickened at the first glimpse of the hat alone? The art had always been hers.

She was riding with a very young gentleman from the frigate. She turned her head and glanced back over her shoulder, and for a second her glance was held by Burnham's fixed and expressionless stare. He read fear, inquiry—yes, and a gleam of coquettish challenge in those blue eyes. Brief as the glance was, he was able to read all this because he knew the girl's eyes of old.

He turned to Elizabeth Nash and smiled.

"That must be the young lady of whom I heard so much yesterday," he said. "A friend of one of the major's wives, I believe. She is the toast of

the regiment, I hear. A pretty little thing, don't you think?"

"Oh, I should call her more than pretty," replied the governor's daughter. "I think she is lovely! I think she is beautiful!"

"Lovely? Beautiful?" repeated Burnham consideringly. "No, my dear lady, I should not call her beautiful"; and he looked at his companion with a glance that said, as plainly as words, that he knew to whom he would apply that term if he dared.

Elizabeth opened her eyes wide upon him in tenderness, wonder, and allurement for a fraction of a second, then veiled them and turned her softly tinted face away from him. Her eyes were no brighter than Kitty's; but they were more versatile, finer, deeper in meaning.

James Burnham, being what he was, felt the charms of Elizabeth with his mind rather than his heart. His nature was more responsive to the glittering attractions of little Kitty Trimmer.

Burnham met Kitty formally that same evening.

He bowed low over her hand and silently cursed the trick of fate that had brought her to Nevis; for he had loved her, in his own peculiar way, and was now confused to find that the old fire was still burning strongly.

Three weeks passed; and during that time Kitty Trimmer made no small stir in the island. Young Mr. Willis, the surgeon, fell in love with her. Captain Sterling, a wealthy planter and a widower of some years' standing, did the same; and so did half a dozen midshipmen from the frigate and half a dozen ensigns and lieutenants of the regiment. Stanton and Burnham were still in that same state.

Stanton tortured his heart with jealous fears and befuddled his brain with strong waters. Burnham hung in the wind, torn between sanity and madness, between cool plans for his advancement and establishment in life and a hot desire to follow his inclinations.

In this temper he made no progress in his affair with the governor's daughter, though he held things as they were by means of devotional silences. I do

not think that Elizabeth was in any hurry to have him declare himself.

Kitty now felt no warmer emotion for James Burnham than fear. She liked and admired Mr. Willis; but she remained faithful to Stanton, though she flirted outrageously with all her admirers.

I have mentioned Captain Sterling, the wealthy planter. It was he who, months before, had purchased a brig load of jailbirds from historic Newgate; but the brig had never come to port in Nevis, and her fate was a mystery to the worthy planter.

The truth of the matter is that, three weeks out from the Thames, John Trimmer had freed himself from his irons by heroic efforts, had then freed his desperate companions, had led them up from the stinking hold, overpowered and slaughtered the officers and crew, and taken command of the ship. That is what John Trimmer had done; and now, whenever he was not wondering about the fate of his cargo of jailbirds, Captain Sterling was dancing attendance on John Trimmer's sister.

Three weeks after the arrival of the frigate in Nevis, while the society of the little island was engaged with feastings, junketings, and flirtations, a small bark entered the harbor with a fine story to tell of recent high-sea outrages that had taken place to the southward. The master of the bark told his news to the governor of the island and the commander of the frigate. From his account it was evident that a new and exceedingly venturesome gentleman of fortune had set to work among the islands.

This latest practitioner was not to be confounded with Major Deck, Hellfire Hicks, or Duval. He sailed a big, white schooner and flew a red flag emblazoned with a device that might be intended to represent a broken leg-iron. The schooner had already been named the *Wasp* by honest seafarers, because of the swiftness of her sting.

She had already stung three times, to the sure knowledge of the master of the bark—once off Carlisle Bay, in Barbados, and twice off St. Lucia. The dreadful and brazen outrages against humanity

and law had been viewed from hilltops ashore. In each case the helpless watchers had seen man after man make the short, bitter passage of the plank, prodded and quickened by knives and cutlases. In every case the despoiled ship had been sent to a deep-sea grave after her crew.

The governor and Captain Moore were horrified and infuriated by the shipmaster's story. They might well demand to know what the world was coming to—which they did. They demanded the information of each other, and of the master of the bark. They pointed the question with shaking fists and embellished it with terrific sea oaths—for the governor, too, had once commanded a ship.

Their faces darkened from red to purple. Piracy was no new thing to them; but this spoiling of cargoes, murdering of honest seamen, and scuttling of honest hulls in fair view of land—of land owned and governed by the English crown—was too flagrant a thing for them to consider with any degree of composure. Neither Duval, Deck, nor Hellfire Hicks had ever been guilty of such insolence.

These deeds of the *Wasp* were slaps in the faces of their majesties, of their majesties' representatives, and of their majesties' ships.

The frigate departed for the field of the *Wasp's* activities three hours later with at least half a dozen of Kitty Trimmer's lovelorn swains aboard.

Two days later, when James Burnham entered the governor's cabinet in the cool of the morning, he found that his excellency had received a bag of letters from England and the southward islands. A merchantman had just arrived from Barbados and had brought the mails from the sloop-of-war *Tartar.*

A letter from the *Tartar's* commander to the governor was the most important item of the mails. It announced that the sloop-of-war, which was fresh out from England, would remain in Carlisle Bay for eight or ten days, undergoing some slight repairs to her yards and spars, and would then weigh anchor for Nevis. She was commissioned to police the narrow seas about the islands of St. Kitts and

Nevis, and so leave bigger ships free to be set at bigger undertakings.

Enclosed in the letter was a list of the sloop's officers. The governor was sitting at his table and reading this list at the moment of Burnham's entrance.

"Letters from home, my lad," said Captain Nash, "by way of Barbados. Nothing important in the English packet. Nothing for you; but, of course, it is too soon for you to expect answers to your letters."

"Yes, sir," replied Burnham, with a flicker of relief in his eyes.

"The *Tartar,* sloop-of-war, is now in Carlisle Bay," continued the governor. "She'll be here in the course of twelve or fourteen days, so her commander writes. And he sends me a list of his officers. Do you happen to have any relative in the navy, lad?"

James Burnham was looking out of the open window when the question was put, and he answered it instantly, without turning his head.

"Alexander, my younger brother, is a lieutenant in the navy," he said coolly. "But why do you ask, sir? Can it be that he's aboard this sloop you speak of?"

"That's it," replied Nash heartily. "He is senior and navigating lieutenant of the *Tartar*. Well, lad, I'm glad to see his name here, and I shall be yet more glad to see him in person on this island. From what I've seen of you, James, I'm more than inclined to like your whole family. I hope I may have the honor of meeting every member of it some day. What d'ye say to that, lad."

Burnham had nothing in particular to say to that; but he turned from the window, bowed low, and stammered a few words of thanks for the governor's polite and more than generous speech. His heart was like lead in his side; but there was a flush on his face which the governor mistook for a blush of pleasure and embarrassment.

"You are too modest, my lad," he said. "Or is it that you are shy? But you'll get over your shyness in time, I dare say. Oh, I've had my eye on

you, Master James! But don't mind me, lad. Don't mind my jokes. Tell me about this brother of yours. How long is it since you last saw him? What does he look like?"

"It is some years since I last saw him," said Burnham. "He was at sea, a middy, when I was last at Burnham. A good lad he is, young Alexander. Did you say you expect the *Tartar* to arrive in twelve or fourteen days?"

"This letter is dated three days ago, and Captain Scovil says he hopes to sail in ten or twelve days," replied the governor, looking at the letter in his hand. "Your brother may be here in ten days' time."

James Burnham looked pleased; but an hour later, in the privacy of his own room, he cursed his luck long and bitterly. Here was surely the ruin of his game in Nevis. Here was the end of his dreams of reëstablishing himself in the comfortable and respectable walk in life into which he had been born.

No exertions on his part could make it possible

for him to marry Elizabeth Nash before the arrival of the sloop-of-war. Well, there was an end of that!

Though luck had gone against James Burnham in the larger matters of life, it had stood by him in the smaller. Deprived of honor and place and the love of his own family, yet he had escaped death at sea and hunger ashore.

Here on Nevis, cast penniless among strangers, he had not been called upon to suffer even the petty thorns of humiliation; and now, though dealt a shrewd blow in the matter of his fine plans for the future, he was left considerably better off than he had been upon landing. His health was good and his pockets were well lined. His luck at play had been phenomenal.

Now he was adrift again and pitted against his old, natural enemy, organized society. He seated himself beside an open window of his cool room and thought it all over. His mood lightened, excited by his devilish and invincible sense of humor.

He thought of Kitty Trimmer, and smiled

eagerly, but unpleasantly. He had a few days of life on Nevis remaining to him, and he decided to make the most of them. He locked the door of his room, drew his money from a safe hiding-place in the bed, and counted it. Then he put it away, unlocked his door, and shouted for Henry Todd.

Henry Todd was doglike in his devotion to James Burnham. He came now, listened attentively to his master's instructions, hid twelve guineas on his person, and went away.

In the cool of the early evening Burnham strolled out upon the hills. He reached a secluded spot, a little natural nook beside the hill path shaded by mango trees, and waited. He did not have to wait long. He soon heard the tattoo of hoofs on the hard trail. A gray pony and its rider appeared around a green corner.

Kitty Trimmer drew rein. Burnham laid a hand on the pony's neck and regarded the young woman with glinting eyes and smiling lips. She returned the gaze for a second, then glanced hastily aside. Her small face flamed.

"I am here," she said unsteadily. "What is it you want to say to me? Be quick with it, please."

"There is no need for haste that I can see," replied James. "My dear little kitten, if I did not know you as well as I do, I might think that you were sorry to be here; but in the light of the past, my sweet puss, I cannot think that. You played a trick on me that few men would forgive in a lifetime; but I have forgiven you. I was always a fool about you, my dear; and, by Heaven, I still am! What d'ye think of that for constancy? But for you, my beauty, I'd be a parson now, with tithes and rents, snug in Wantage vicarage and the odor of sanctity, and with my name still intact in my father's will. That's the truth, my dear, as well you know. And here I am still a fool and ready to break myself again for you. Would Stanton do or dare as much for you? Not he!"

He caught one of her hands, and, though she made a quick, brief effort to withdraw it, he held it tight. She trembled and kept her face averted.

"Percy would venture anything for me," she

said. "He loves me. He will marry me, come what may of it!"

"Not he, the sluggish sot," sneered Burnham. "Marry you? It may be so; but you'll get lean cheer of that. The fellow is a coward. When his precious parents take him in hand you'll find him a rare, fine husband—a champion to be proud of. They'll strip him of the corset maker's fortune, I tell you, the moment they get wind of the marriage. They think they can buy a daughter of some family of condition for him; and what think you they'll say when they find him held in matrimonial leash by the wench of the tailor of Wantage? Corset maker and breeches maker. There is too much a sameness of degree there for either one to mend the other in the eyes of the fashionable world."

Kitty's shoulders drooped and trembled with ill-suppressed sobs.

"Picture your bold Percy with empty pockets," continued Burnham heartlessly. "Picture that flabby, befuddled fool with his bread to win by his own hand and a wife to feed. Use your wits, my

dear! You know him; and look at me, my kitten. If my father disowns me, do I go naked and hungry? I have been robbed at home, and again in these islands; but do you see me in rags, or slinking in side alleys, or any man's servant? Nature armed me at birth for the game of life. I see a play in these seas, my girl, that lacks nothing but a true gamester. I shall grasp a fortune among these islands. Come back to me, Kitty! We are of the spirit that rides defeat, you and I. I was born with teeth, as some play writer has said of some king. Come away from Nevis with me, and I swear that I will make you my wife, my pretty!"

He slipped his left arm about her slender waist as she sat in the saddle.

"You must let me go," she whispered; but she neither struggled in his embrace nor urged the pony forward or aside.

Had his mind not been dulled by the heat of his blood, he would have suspected a trick of some kind; but he laughed, clasped her in both arms, and drew her tantalizing face downward and sidewise

to his. The docile pony did not move. The young woman did not resist; but suddenly, turning her face a little so that Burnham's lips were upon one of her smooth cheeks, she screamed.

Then James Burnham's wits flashed awake, and he sprang back from the trail as if he had been stung. The brief tropic twilight had slipped away and the white stars were shining. Three men, afoot, rushed at him; and Kitty lashed the pony and went up the track at a hand gallop.

Burnham was unarmed. Rage boiled in him to the verge of madness. She had tricked him again, even while his lips were upon her face!

The three gallants came at him somewhat clumsily, with more noise than agility, cutting at him wildly with heavy-thonged whips. Percy Stanton was one of them; and all three were under the influence of the mess port.

Burnham snatched up a billet which had fallen from the load of some wood-cutter and laid about him to such good purpose that the three merry gentlemen were speedily disarmed. He took Stanton

by the scruff of the neck and thrashed him soundly, the other two standing by and looking on. And as Burnham plied his stick he unburdened himself of his opinion of Stanton and Kitty Trimmer.

VIII

HIS jealousy and hatred of James Burnham had landed Stanton in a very awkward position. Kitty had told him that Burnham had asked her to meet him at a certain spot at a certain hour. He and the girl had agreed to make a trap for Burnham; and with this end in view he had brought two younger brother officers along with him, armed with whips. And now these friends of his, suddenly become more or less sober, agreed with Burnham that the only possible thing for Stanton to do, as an officer and a gentleman, was to fight.

"Confound you, Percy," said one of them, "you brought us on a mission that no gentleman should share with another! I'm beginning to think that you and the lady laid a trap for Mr. Burnham. Why didn't she scream sooner, else? For I'll swear she let him kiss her without a struggle. However that may be, he has dusted your coat for you with

a stick, and you must have his blood for it—or spill a little of your own—for the honor of the regiment and of their majesties' uniform."

"Nothing else to be done, I assure you," said Captain Cross. "If you don't fight Mr. Burnham, my boy, you must fight me for taking advantage of me when in my cups and drawing me into a purely private affair. I'm not this gentleman's guardian. If he wants to kiss a lady in whom you are interested, that is his concern—and yours and the lady's."

"If you are armed," said Mr. Throgmorton, "the little affair might be settled here and now. But I see that you are not armed. Very good! Some one will have to return to barracks for weapons and a lantern."

"One moment, gentlemen, if you please," said James Burnham. "I have a suspicion that Mr. Stanton is not in such haste to deal with me, but that he is willing to wait a few hours. A bath and a few hours of sleep on his part would put us on a more equal footing. What say you? Cannot we

arrange for a meeting at dawn, on the sands at the cold spring? There is a secluded spot, with footing as level as a floor. As to weapons—but who is the challenger?"

"This is very handsome of you, sir," said Captain Cross. "At dawn to-morrow let it be. Throgmorton and I will arrange the details. Stanton is the challenger, of course. Will you be so kind as to name the weapons, sir?"

"I have contended against you gentlemen, all three of you, in friendly shooting matches," said Burnham. "You all know what I can do with a pistol."

"We do," said Mr. Throgmorton. "The knowledge cost me twenty guineas in bets, if I remember rightly. You are the best shot I have ever seen. You name pistols, then?"

"No," replied Burnham. "I name swords."

"Very handsome of you!" exclaimed Cross and Throgmorton.

Stanton said nothing. He was a good swordsman, but he had no stomach for bloodshed.

James Burnham returned to Government House with an indescribable bitterness pinching his heart. Even the prospect of a fight could not lighten his mood just then.

Kitty had betrayed him again; Kitty had escaped him again. He had never demanded virtue of her, as virtue is understood by the respectable, but he had always given her credit for a sort of rogues' honesty. He hated her now; but he knew that the hatred would not last.

He found Henry Todd waiting for him in his room. He locked the door, threw aside his hat and skirted coat, and sank into a deep chair beside an open window. One candle burned in a sheltered corner.

"I got the boat, sir," said Henry Todd. "What next, cap'n?"

"I believe you still take me for a pirate," said Burnham.

"No, sir," replied the lad. "Leastwise, I take yer honor for whatever ye want to name yerself; but

I have heard it said as how a fine gentleman makes a brisker pirate nor any common sailorman."

An hour later Todd took his departure by way of the window. Mr. Burnham let a small, heavy box down to him on the end of a strong cord, and next let down a bulky leather bag.

Todd, with the bag under his left arm and the box in his right hand, vanished among the garden shrubberies, and Burnham went to his desk at the back of the room and lit another candle. He spread out a few sheets of paper and trimmed a quill. He filled a pipe and lit it at the flame of the candle. His mind turned from Kitty Trimmer to Elizabeth Nash.

James Burnham wrote a letter of farewell to the governor's daughter. The morning might see his death; at the best it would find him an outcast again, with disgrace behind him and hardships and danger in front; but he smiled and dipped his pen and applied himself to the art of words with an undivided mind.

He wrote, crossed out, and rewrote. He gnawed

his pen and sighed. To anyone looking in at the window he might have been mistaken for some utterly lovesick, half-inspired poet penning a sonnet to Diana or the stars. At last he made a clean copy of his composition—and here it is:

My Sweet and Honored and Incomparable Lady:

Greeting—and farewell. I go to-morrow from this earthly paradise. I pray that I go to my death; for how, save by death, am I to forget? You will know something of my reason for flight—or death—to-morrow; and you will learn more from my brother.

But the true cause of my despair and flight has nothing to do with the result of wine-bred anger or youthful folly. Despair chills me, grief consumes me; for I know that I can never win your love. I might aspire to your tender pity and sweet friendship—but something deep in my heart tells me that only a good man can ever claim your love.

I make no claim to virtue; but in return for your

sweet pity I give you my torn heart's homage. If I live beyond the morrow, I shall ever keep sacred and bright the memories of these days during which I have walked at one and the same time in heaven and in a fool's paradise. I shall never cease to thank God that I was permitted to be of slight service to you once; and death itself shall not wrest from me the dear cadences of your voice and the tender caresses of your pure eyes.

That God may shield and prosper you, and keep your dear heart tender toward the homeless and friendless, is the prayer of your loving and humble servant. JAMES BURNHAM.

It was not a long letter; but he had given an hour to the writing of it. He read it over with a smile, sealed it, and inscribed it to Miss Elizabeth Nash. For a second or two he felt almost as if the thing he had written was the truth.

"That is what it is to be a poet," he said. "You can make yourself believe anything—for a little while!"

Then he laughed, undressed, and retired.

Before the sun was above the eastern sea five men gathered on the sand beside the cold spring, at the roots of the whitewood trees, by the gentle beat and seethe of the soft-footed surf. The east was aflame with clearest gold and rose; above that the pale-green of twilight; westward of that again a few paling stars.

The breathing sea lay half in shadow, half in fire. Birds awoke and twittered in the thickets of sea grape and whitewood. The air was cool and a little breeze fanned in from the vast salt acres.

The five men stood close together for a moment or two and exchanged a few words; then Stanton withdrew a few paces to the left and James Burnham to the right. Young Mr. Willis, the surgeon, had brought a case containing bandages, surgical needles, and stimulants. Captain Cross carried a bundle under one arm. He threw it down, unrolled it, and disclosed two straight rapiers to the clean radiance of the new day.

Mr. Throgmorton examined the swords, weigh-

ing them one against the other, shaking them until the long blades flickered. He measured them, holding them hilt to hilt.

"As like as two peas," he said.

Captain Cross paced about on the sand, staring down at it and testing it with shuffling, stamping feet. The lieutenant followed him. At last the captain seemed satisfied and, after a word with Throgmorton, he went over to where James Burnham stood staring seaward with an emotionless face. He raised his hat in grim and formal salute, and Burnham replied in kind. He presented one of the rapiers, hilt to the front.

"Your sword, sir," he said. "I have assured myself that it is a dependable weapon. If you will take your ground now, Mr. Burnham, we will get along with this little affair. The light is not bad and the footing is admirable."

James Burnham bowed again, then let his hat fall to the sand. He did not so much as glance at the sword in his hand, but tucked it under his left arm and walked steadily to the spot selected by the

seconds for the combat. He took his ground with his right shoulder to the flaming east.

As Stanton was not yet ready, he dropped the point of his sword to the toe of his buckled shoe, folded his hands lightly on the hilt, and glanced idly around him. His face was like a mask and his eyes were cool, and yet in his heart the lust of blood seethed and bubbled.

Coatless and hatless, clothed only in a thin white shirt and blue breeches, narrow of flank, deep of chest, straight of back, he cut a fine figure. His hair was simply tied and lightly powdered. His right arm was naked almost to the shoulder, showing a skin as white as milk above the brown wrist and the curves and flickerings of long, lean muscles.

Stanton took his ground, under the direction of Throgmorton, with his left shoulder to the east, As they stood, the light was to neither's advantage.

Stanton also was stripped to shirt and breeches. He was a straight, heavily built young man, an inch taller than James Burnham, and perhaps more than

an inch longer in the arm. His waist was thick, his hips large, his thighs and flanks round. His fine chest and shoulders were a trifle too heavy.

He was certainly not in the pink of condition, although youth and a strong constitution still did much to make good the wear and tear of deep cups and long hours. His big, naked sword arm was red. His face was white. But theoretically, at least, he was the best swordsman in his regiment.

At a word from Captain Cross, Burnham and Stanton saluted each other with their swords. Next instant the blades struck with a tinkle. The morning light caught the trembling points and flickered there like fire.

The blades stood motionless, as if welded together; but the muscles of the naked arms rippled and twitched. Wrists were being tested. The two men stood eye to eye. Their feet began to shift position a little on the firm sand.

Stanton lowered his point suddenly and thrust. His point caught, for a fraction of a second, in the fold of linen between Burnham's shoulder and el-

bow, and he was forced to recover with a jump. Burnham smiled slightly.

And now the fighters began to stamp and sidestep, stand poised, advance a little, retire a little, like dancing masters; and the slender blades struck and glanced and writhed the one upon the other, and the silver guards tinkled more than once.

The sun came clean out of the sea with a face of colorless fire and struck his white glare fairly into Burnham's eyes. The heavy but artful Stanton had worked around to the position he wanted. Yet Burnham seemed undismayed. He turned a thrust aside with ease and composure. His eyes did not narrow or flinch before the full glare of the sun; at least, the lids did not move, though the pupils contracted to pin points.

Stanton breathed heavily and struck heavily to beat in the other's guard. The seconds began to feel the strain upon their nerves. Willis gazed seaward, his thin, kindly young face as white as his shirt.

Stanton's brow, cheeks, and throat glistened with

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sweat. The sun was at his back and full in his enemy's eyes. The next thrust would end it. He put forth all the strength of wrist and shoulder to press aside that slender barrier. He had the fellow at his mercy.

The pressure began to tell on the other's blade. He uttered a gusty sigh through parted lips, lowered his point, and lunged as quick as light.

And then it happened, so swiftly that none could see the way of it. Stanton, struck in the very moment of victory, sank to the sand and the red blood leaped out upon the white linen on his breast. Burnham stood motionless, with the red point of his sword in the lilac sand.

"I intended to run him through the shoulder; but the light was in my eyes," he said. "I have not given him his death wound, I trust."

Willis fell on his knees beside the wounded man and set to work with his bandages. Throgmorton shuddered, turned away, and brushed a square of perfumed lace across his dripping face. Captain

Cross went over to Burnham and extended his hand.

"Death wound or no, your conscience is clean in this matter," he said. "You could not have escaped the meeting with honor. Stanton is a skilled swordsman and fought to kill; and no one will deny that the sun was fair in your eyes, and every advantage to Stanton, when you pinked him. But you'll have to get away and lie low for a while, at least—until the result is known. It's a confounded shame, but I fear that it is so, nevertheless. What are your plans? What can I do for you? Have you any money for your immediate needs?"

"You are very kind," replied James. "I have a little money and can make shift, I think. Captain Nash will give me a few days of grace in which to get away from the island, even if Stanton should die before night. It was a fair fight, and one which I could not avoid. Don't worry about me, sir. I'll rest here for a little while. I meant to wing him, but the sun was in my eyes."

They carried Stanton away, still breathing and

still bleeding, and James Burnham was left alone. He still held the sword with which he had wounded Stanton and of which Captain Cross had forgotten to relieve him.

As Burnham stood there gripping his bloody sword, a look of exultation swept his face like a sudden fire. He turned, picked up his hat and cloak, and moved briskly along the beach, but not in the direction which led to the town. He cast a cool and calculating glance at the burnished sea and the clear, glowing sky. He rounded a point and beheld a fishing boat riding at anchor in a little cove and the trusty Todd pacing the sand with a cutlas on his hip and a musket on his shoulder.

"All's ready, sir," said Todd, his eyes fixed in a fascinated stare upon the naked blade in his master's right hand. He saw that the sheen of the polished metal was dimmed at the point. "Water an' victuals, bag an' box, all safe aboard, cap'n. Did yer honor kill the military gentleman, might I make so bold as to ask?"

"He may recover, though I doubt it," answered

Burnham with a grin. "But however that may be, my lad, our sheltered and full-fed days in this tight little isle have come to an end. I was sickening of it, anyhow. We must take the world by the windpipe again and pinch a living out of it whether it is willing or no."

The fight and the spilling of blood had put Burnham in a good humor and Kitty Trimmer out of his mind. He waded out to the boat, with Henry Todd at his heels. He found everything there, even as Todd had said—the box, the leather bag, a breaker of water, fruit, and a bag of bread. They hoisted themselves aboard, stepped the short mast, and pulled up the little anchor. Then Todd unslung the heavy cutlas from his waist and turned the boat's nose to seaward with the oars.

Percy Stanton was carried to his quarters by secluded paths and finally laid upon his bed. Here Willis examined the wound again, washed it, applied a compress and fresh bandages. The captain and Throgmorton then left the room, and Willis sat alone with the wounded duelist until Dr. Hamm,

the regimental surgeon, entered the room on tiptoe, with a fat finger pressed archly on a fat lower lip. He closed the door behind him and turned the key in the lock.

"A pretty fight, Cross tells me," he whispered, advancing and gazing down curiously and with considerable relish at Stanton. "I didn't think Percy had the pluck, and that's a fact. Alive, stap me if he isn't—and bleeding nicely! He'll recover, unless the fever gets him or the blood turns and drains inward. With luck, he'll pull through; for he has the constitution of an ox. A few weeks spent in bed, on the flat of his back, will do him no harm. I'll report to the colonel that he was injured by a throw from his horse, but well I can remember the days when little accidents of this kind did not have to be hidden under a bushel. We're becoming too nice in our morals, Willis. I've been out myself. Bless your soul, yes—three times in all, and killed my man once. Men were men in those days, and not a pack of old ladies. I've seen a parson go out in the dawning with his own church warden and

wing him as neat as you please at twenty paces. I have a hole in my own chest here that would astonish you could you see it. So it was a good fight, was it? Wish I had been there, stap me if I don't!"

"It was a close fight, sir," replied Willis. "Stanton seemed to have the advantage up to the very moment of falling. The sun shone full into Burnham's eyes."

"I could have told you how it would end," said Dr. Hamm. "Did you think for a moment that this hulk had any chance against a son of old Walter Burnham, of Burnham? They are of a fighting strain, the Burnhams, with a dash of the fiend in it. And where is Burnham now? I trust that he'll not be fool enough to run away. No need of it, even if Percy goes out. All that the authorities need ever hear of it is that the young sot fell from his horse."

"I don't know what Burnham intends to do," replied Willis. "We left him on the beach, poor fellow. He meant only to wing Stanton."

IX

CAPTAIN ALGERNON NASH, governor of Nevis, was accustomed to doing all his official business for the day in the cool of the morning, between the hours of seven and ten. Recently he had come to depend more than he knew upon the help and society of James Burnham during these hours.

On this particular morning he sat alone until close upon eight o'clock, idle and expectant, then sent a servant to Mr. Burnham's room. The man returned with the information that the room was empty, and with a sealed letter in his hand addressed to Miss Nash. The letter was delivered to Elizabeth and people were sent here and there through the house and grounds in search of Burnham.

Mr. Willis, who had returned from Stanton's quarters, admitted that he had seen James Burnham early that morning; and a few pressing ques-

tions brought forth the story of the duel. The governor swore violently and despatched a party of men to the wooded hills. Then he went to his daughter.

The governor found Elizabeth with tears in her eyes and on her cheeks and the open letter in her hand.

"Where is he hiding himself?" demanded Captain Nash. "What's the matter with the young fool? Does he think I would hang him for fighting a duel, or even for killing his man in fair fight? And I've heard about the fight. What does he tell you there?"

"He has gone away," replied Elizabeth in shaking tones. "He is in some trouble, I think. He has left the island by now, I fear me. Was he wounded? And with whom did he fight?"

"He wasn't touched. He pinked Stanton very neatly, though the sun was in his eyes. Did they quarrel about you? What has he written to you?"

The girl handed the open paper to him and sank her face between her hands. The governor read

slowly, his lips moving over each word in a kind of breathing half whisper, like a child at its book. His brows puckered as he read; his hand trembled; his cheeks paled.

"If he loves you like this, why didn't he tell us so?" he exploded. "Youthful follies! Let them be regretted and forgotten. Like enough I was a fool myself once. And you loved him?"

"I—I do not know," sobbed Elizabeth. "I think so—and again I am not sure. He was brave and kind. He saved my life; but I do not know whether or not I loved him as he loves me!"

"A queer thing," said the governor, "a mighty queer thing!"

James Burnham and Henry Todd crossed the narrow seaway between Nevis and the southern point of St. Kitts, rounded the cape, and sailed slowly along the eastern coast of the larger island. Tides of green foliage descended the rounded hills to the narrow, winding strip of sand. The seas, pale-green in the shallows, sparkled into the sand

and fell upon it in thin, white froth. The wind was light.

Burnham tended sheet and tiller and Henry Todd crouched in the bows and scanned the coast. Burnham, too, kept a sharp eye on the coast and the climbing hills. Perhaps he looked for the gray roofs of a village, or for some sign of cultivated land. It is likely enough that he was content to look out for whatever chance might show; that he expected nothing—or anything. He was waiting for his opponent's throw—and Fate was his opponent. In the mean time he tended sheet and tiller, scanned the near coast, and smoked his pipe.

His mind went back calmly and pleasantly to the duel with Stanton. He went over it from the courtly beginning to the desperate finish, point by point, and was satisfied absolutely with it. He had taken a slight risk, perhaps, when he let himself take the sun in his eyes; but the artistic conclusion of the affair was well worth the risk. He was becoming nicer in his methods as he grew older and

took the measure of the world against which he played.

He thought of Kitty. Well, he had taught her a lesson; he had shown her what manner of straw man she was clinging to; and some day he would make a point of teaching her still more of the error of her ways.

The sun climbed high. The narrow beach unwound before them, and deep, untenanted valleys opened to their gaze. Suddenly a boat propelled by four oars shot into the sea ahead of them from behind a little green point.

Henry Todd shouted. Burnham swore and swung the boat's head up to the wind; but the other craft shot across her bows and a man in the stern stood up with a musket in his hands.

"This is no time to burn powder," said Burnham. "They are ten to two, and they have the wind of us. We'll just fall away on our old course and let them come alongside and explain what they want. If they want trouble, we can start it then as well as now."

The boat with the four oars swung and approached. The man with the musket in the crook of his left arm shouted to Todd to lower the sail.

"Lower away," ordered Burnham.

The other craft was a ship's long-boat. She contained eleven men, including the four at the oars, and the sunshine struck upon polished metal aboard her in many points of fire. She drew swiftly down upon the fishing boat. The features of the man with the musket grew clear to the gaze of the fugitives. James Burnham uttered an astonished oath.

"'Tis John Trimmer!" he exclaimed. "John Trimmer of Wantage, as I live! The highwayman, the breeches maker's son, Kitty's brother!"

The man with the musket bowed and flourished his hat. He grinned.

"Welcome to the narrow seas, Master James Burnham!" he cried.

Burnham got to his feet and returned the salutation in silence. His face showed no more emotion than a wooden mask; but his keen eyes flickered over Trimmer and his company, and his mind

jumped to the true and amazing conclusion that John Trimmer had escaped the clutch of the law and was now taking toll of the seas as he had taken toll of the roads.

There was no mistaking the calling of the fellows in the long-boat. Again his glance flickered over those hardy and villainous faces. Even the rowers had twisted around on the thwarts and were staring at him. He felt a glow of admiration for John Trimmer.

The rowers threw their oars inboard and the boats touched and lay gunwale to gunwale. James Burnham smiled, stepped lightly from the fishing boat into the crowded long-boat, and extended his hand to John Trimmer. He was unarmed.

"Well met, John Trimmer!" he said heartily. "Good morning to you, my brave lads all. Jack and I are boyhood friends. Jack, you must tell me how you managed this—for, on my soul, I had small expectations of meeting you thus, your own master again and with ten sturdy seamen at your back. I congratulate you, Jack!"

John Trimmer looked pleased. He was as vain as a pretty girl in spite of his ruthless strength, and it delighted him to have a Burnham of Burnham—even an outcast Burnham—greet him with such evident admiration and warmth. He grasped the offered hand cordially.

"Story for story, Jim," he said. "But, first of all, what are you about now, cruising along this coast with one companion? And where d'ye hail from last? Are ye looking for anyone in particular, by any chance?"

"To be quite frank with you, I'm a fugitive from Nevis, where I have been living of late as a gentleman of blameless reputation and good prospects," answered Burnham, smiling down at the hard-bit faces turned up to him curiously and suspiciously. "But Alexander is expected at Nevis in a few days, aboard the sloop-of-war *Tartar,*" he continued; "so I thought it wiser to slip away. I am in disgrace with my family, you know. The fact is, my dear father disowned me and shipped me off to Kingston. I've had some adventures since then. This

very morning, before leaving Nevis, I fought a duel with a military gentleman—his last affair, I think."

Trimmer nodded to his companions and spoke a few low words of command. Four of his fellows stepped into Burnham's boat and took up the oars. Henry Todd sprang to his feet.

"Stay where you are, my lad," said Burnham. "You are among friends."

He sat down calmly beside John Trimmer in the stern-sheets of the long-boat, and both boats pulled northward up the coast, side by side. They were run ashore some fifty yards to the south of the green point from behind which the long-boat had first appeared. The boats were beached and all hands crossed the strip of sand to the shade of the wood.

Trimmer and his company drew aside from Burnham and Henry Todd and talked together in low voices for several minutes. Trimmer spoke as one with authority. Twice he slammed his right fist into his left palm. As he talked, there was

much nodding of heads and squirting of tobacco juice.

Then Trimmer turned and beckoned to Henry Todd to approach. Henry obeyed, but with quaking knees. Burnham could see that they were questioning Todd; and he smiled, produced his pipe, filled it, and lit it. His hands did not tremble in the somewhat trying task of striking a light with his flint.

Trimmer came over to Burnham's side and stood silent for a moment, gazing down at him.

"What are your prospects, Jim?" he asked.

Burnham laughed.

"I have seventy guineas in the little box there," he said. "I cannot go back to Nevis; and if I ever return to England my own father will hand me over to the law for a highwayman. Something went wrong with a certain ring which you gave me, Jack."

"Would you care to join my company?" asked Trimmer. "We need men of your kidney; and for your sake we are willing to take this lad Todd,

though he doesn't look much like a—well, a gentleman of fortune."

"Gladly!" cried Burnham, rising to his feet and grinning at the tailor's son. "I accept your offer with gratitude, and so spare you the unpleasant duty of naming the alternative course for me."

Trimmer laughed uproariously and slapped the other's shoulder.

The white schooner lay in a deep, narrow pocket hemmed in by tangled forests. The entrance to this haven was not more than twenty yards across, but it widened within to a width of close upon eighty yards. Here was sea room in which to swing the schooner around with the help of the boats. She lay now at the back of the basin, with her nose toward the entrance, moored by two lines. Awnings of old sails shaded the decks.

Trimmer showed Burnham over the schooner, then told his story. He had slipped his shackles, freed his companions in misery, and overpowered the officers and crew of the brig *Good Cheer,* as we

know. The life of the third mate had been spared because none of the jailbirds knew navigation.

The brig made heavy weather throughout the week immediately following her change of masters. A score of the miserable beings sickened and died and were thrown into the sea. The survivors of the desperate and deplorable company elected John Trimmer to the post of captain; Dodd, another ex-highwayman, to the berth of first mate; and a pick-pocket called Slim Sam to the honorable position of second officer. The former third mate kept his old berth and performed all the duties of navigating and sailing the brig.

In the course of time a signal of distress brought a schooner from New England alongside the *Good Cheer*. Trimmer hid all his armed men save six, then informed the master of the schooner that he had escaped from a pirate only to be knocked about by a gale, and that he was now short of men, fresh water, and provisions. The New Englanders came aboard the brig in a hurry, doubtless to ascertain the nature of the cargo with a view to confiscating it.

Otherwise, why did they come armed and to the number of twenty?

However that may be, Captain Trimmer's fellows made short and bloody work of them. The schooner, left short-handed, attempted to escape at the first outcry of the conflict; but Trimmer had foreseen this, and had the brig's three guns ready trained on the schooner's spars behind a screen of empty casks. So the schooner's wings were crippled; and later she was overhauled. Captain Trimmer, and what remained of his villainous company, transferred themselves from the brig to the schooner, together with everything of value in the brig.

A few weeks later Trimmer had been fortunate enough to encounter a large merchant ship at the moment of mutiny. He boarded and joined the fight when the victory was hanging in the balance and both sides were weak and exhausted. He overpowered both the contending parties with great slaughter, recruited from the pick of the survivors,

then looted and scuttled the ship. She proved a rich prize.

Two weeks later he had an opportunity to careen and scrape his schooner and to paint her. He painted out the vessel's original name and, for luck, let her go without a name. And this whim had proved lucky. He had taken many ships and lost nothing more valuable than a score or so of his men.

"She is called the *Wasp,*" said Burnham. "A good name for her, from the point of view of the fools she stings!"

"There's no luck in a name," replied Trimmer doggedly, "so don't you give her one, Jim. Now tell me what deviltries fetched you to these parts. Pass the rum and the water-monkey first."

The white schooner continued to lie in the hidden basin until the morning of the third day after James Burnham's fight with Percy Stanton. Seamen posted in treetops on the surrounding hills kept a sharp and wide lookout. Burnham devoted these days to a close study of the nameless schooner's

company; and, though Trimmer offered him a berth aft, he chose to sleep in the forecastle and rate himself as an able seaman.

Discipline was slack. The afterguard, as well as the crew, had changed considerably since the first election of leaders. Men had died violent deaths and new men had been recruited. Dodd, one-time first mate, had died of a cutlas wound and gone to the fishes. Slim Sam, the ex-pickpocket, was now second in command. Wells, who had been third mate of the *Good Cheer,* still acted as sailing master.

This Wells was a quiet man with a high brow and a weak chin. No amount of pistols thrust in his belt could make him look like a pirate. The boatswain and the chief gunner were sailors, not jailbirds—and yet, by their faces and the stories they told, one knew them to be ripe for the gallows.

The quartermaster was also a sailor; but about fifty per cent. of the hands represented Newgate

and the original company. All told, the schooner's company now numbered forty-six.

Burnham studied these new associates of his with interest, and was amused to note how little they differed, save in profession and manners, from other societies in which he had mixed—from the gentry of Berkshire, the hell-rakes of London, and the officials and planters of Nevis.

Trimmer himself looked like an honest and kindly yeoman, except when his anger was aroused or his vanity wounded. His face was square, his skin rough and ruddy, his head round as a bullet. He was by nature merry of spirit and of sturdy constitution; and the bloodshed and hard, high living of his calling had not yet impaired either his humor or his health. Ashore in populous ports he was an untiring singer in taverns, a great pincher of feminine cheeks and chucker of feminine chins.

Slim Sam suggested to Burnham's mind a priest in a hair shirt, so narrow was his face, so inbrooding his dark eyes, so modest his manner and quiet his voice. He wore no bright colors, he cropped his

hair, he drank only the thinnest of wines. He was never seen with a weapon except when actually in action. He never raised his voice in argument, laughter, or anger. He impressed James Burnham as being a person worthy of particular study.

Burnham did not mention Kitty's presence in Nevis to her brother. He thought it wiser not to mix family and business affairs.

The white schooner left Bottle Harbor at dawn, sailed south and east until noon, and then headed due south. She was a clever sailor and could make the most of light and uncertain airs. Wells handled her with skill.

James Burnham was in Slim Sam's watch. He worked willingly, but the tasks that day were as light as the currents of air. When there was no work to be done aloft or alow, the men of the watch sat down in whatever patch of shade took their fancy and smoked and yarned or even played at cards or dice.

Most of them had coin, and those who had no coin had trinkets or silks. It seems that Captain

Trimmer's method of doing business was to declare dividends every capture and pass every man's share of the spoils over to him. The schooner counted as five men, and so took five shares, the resultant fund being devoted to her upkeep. The captain took three shares to himself; all other officers, no matter of what grade, two shares each; and able-bodied members of the crew, including the two cooks, got one share each. There were three lads who only drew half shares.

They never robbed one another, save through the medium of cards or dice. They left their treasure lying in unlocked chests, in open bags, or even loose in their berths. Play was high and drinking was heavy; but, if a man became unduly troublesome in his cups or dangerously excited over the play, he was promptly brought to order.

During the first two days out from Bottle Harbor James Burnham lost fifty of his seventy guineas at play. Early on the third day a flashing white sail was sighted to the westward. Captain

Trimmer went aloft and examined it through his glass.

He reported a large sloop, a single-sticker with a cloud of head-sails, southward bound. Beyond a doubt it was the *Tartar* heading for Nevis; so the white schooner held on her way.

The bright day wore on to a red sunset and a star-spangled night. Burnham diced for a couple of hours in the cabin with Trimmer and Wells and won ten guineas. He then left the cabin and made himself a bed of sorts of an old sail on the deck. He lay in the starboard scuppers, amidships, in the shadow of the bulwarks.

X

JAMES BURNHAM slept soundly until trodden upon by a bare but heavy foot. He was upright in the scuppers, with his back against the bulwarks and a knife in his hand almost before his eyes were open. The man who had stepped on him recoiled with a startled oath. Burnham sheathed his knife even more swiftly than he had drawn it.

"Hark!" cautioned the other. "D'ye hear it? Musketry. And I'll swear I saw a light but a moment before I trod on ye."

A mist had blown in between the sea and the stars while Burnham slept. The schooner rolled lazily, with scarce more than steerageway on her. The wind sagged, puffed with an effort, sagged and puffed again.

Burnham gazed to starboard and listened, with his shoulder to the man who had awakened him. He could see nothing but the gray blackness that filled the sky and shrouded the sea. He heard the

indolent, hollow flap of an empty head-sail, the whispering effort of the brig mainsail trying to hold the elusive breeze, the patter of reef points, and the spatter and sob of the little seas along the side. He heard the fellow at his shoulder breathing heavily and smelled the reek of his pipe.

He strained ears and eyes against the dark and distance. And then he caught it—the ghost of echoes; and for a fraction of a second his eyes seemed to grasp a spot of red in the gloom.

"There!" said the other. "Small arms! I'll report it to the cap'n."

Burnham remained with his hands on the great teakwood rail and watched and listened for another sight or sound of the thing. He caught the muffled, rapping ghost of sound again. His blood quickened. Fighting was going on out there in the sea gloom beyond a doubt. Perhaps two ships lay side to side, held by the grappling irons, with blood already spilling on deck and rail, with dead men in the scuppers and wounded men crawling to the shelter of mast and companionway.

An English ship and a French ship might be out there, fastened in the death grip; but he thought it more likely that some craft of their own kidney had fastened upon a trader. Ships of war, with their heavy metal, would have kept up a discharge of big guns even after they had grappled.

The course of the white schooner was altered. She moved through the gloom with steerageway and no more, rolling lazily. She showed no lights. Men gathered in groups in the waist, on the forecastle deck, on the poop.

An hour passed with only one more whisper of the muffled sounds to leeward; and then night's lid lifted a hair's breadth in the east. The wind freshened. Captain Trimmer came to James Burnham's elbow and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Something was going on, Jim," he said. "If our luck holds, we'll find pickings of some kind, and maybe a fight. How d'ye feel for a fight?"

"I'd give the last of my few guineas for a chance to draw and have at something!" replied Burnham.

Trimmer's hand lifted from the other's shoulder and pointed into the gray ahead. He uttered a volley of oaths which, though they fairly blistered the air, were intended to express satisfaction and astonishment. Burnham peered in the direction indicated and saw a something, a vague shape, in the gloom of sea and sky.

"A schooner!" exclaimed the captain. "And crippled, too! Beaten off, as I live! Then where's the trader? There she lays; d'ye see her? Both crippled. And here are we, Master Burnham, to reap the harvest, like the good farmers we are. Blister me, it's a case I've dreamed of, but never hoped to see! And who'll it be, now? Hellfire Hicks, d'ye think? I'll tell ye in two or three minutes. The light grows fast."

He slapped Burnham on the back and hurried aft in high spirits.

The light flooded swiftly out of the east, and James Burnham saw two vessels rocking on the little gray seas not half a mile away from the schooner and within two hundred yards of each

other. One could see at a glance that they were lame ducks, although most of their spars were standing.

One was a long, low schooner, the other a short, high brig. The schooner had lost her maintop, the wreckage of which still cluttered her deck. She had a sharp list to larboard and seemed to be short-handed. The brig had lost a few yards and was down by the head.

Orders were shouted aboard the white schooner. Men raced along the deck with glowing faces and hair-raising jokes. It was said by some that the crippled schooner was Hellfire Hicks's *Black Polly*. Guns were uncovered and manned by their crews. Pistols and cutlases and pikes were brought from below.

The cripples showed feeble but anxious signs of life. Head-sails were run up on the listed schooner, and the heavy-headed brig made a patch or two of sail and moved sluggishly before the wind. The men of the white schooner laughed at the brig's efforts to escape, set their curved hands to their

mouths, and bellowed words of ironic encouragement and advice across the brightening sea.

"She'll sail to the bottom on that course," said one. "Hope she don't dive afore we pick her bones!"

James Burnham strapped a cutlas about his waist and brought from his berth in the forecastle the long, straight blade with which he had wounded Stanton on the sands of Nevis. He felt a lust for conflict and a thirst for blood untouched by any sense of remorse, pity, or compunction. The world was against him, his own people were against him, and fate itself—God or the gods—had struck at his life; so he was against them all.

He was for James Burnham the disowned and outcast, with only his head and his hands to befriend him. But he felt no more pity for himself than for the poor fools aboard the brig or the desperate rogues on the crippled schooner.

He did not think of his mother's gray hairs, of his father's pride, of Elizabeth Nash, or even of Kitty Trimmer. He gave no thought to the past

or to the distant future, but waited with tingling blood and glinting eyes for the devil's dance of combat to commence.

The day flooded clean and clear from east to west. The wind held steady, but light. The white schooner raced down upon the black schooner, leaving the brig to stagger off on a long slant to the westward. Both the crippled vessels were in easy range of Trimmer's guns, but no shot was fired.

"That's the *Black Polly,*" said Trimmer to Burnham. "Hicks told a girl in La Guayra that he'd chase me off these seas inside the year. I wonder if he's rememberin' it now—if he's alive. We'll waste no powder on 'em, Jim. They've smashed each other to a finish, d'ye see, at long range, at short range, an' then rail to rail; and all that's left for us to do is to pick 'em up, one at a time, and gut 'em. Hicks got the wrong sow by the ear when he laid hold o' that brig. They've unshipped each other's big guns, burned all their powder, an' cut each other's throats. I think I'll send off the boats. That'll be quicker than layin' her alongside."

The white schooner hauled abreast of the black schooner. Three of the *Wasp's* boats were swung out; and the men who sprang into them while they still hung higher than the bulwarks could see all the tragedy and helplessness of the *Black Polly's* listed decks. They saw blood and corpses and two overturned cannon, a living man at the wheel under the break of the poop, and three crouching men, armed and alive, among the huddled and prostrate dead.

The *Black Polly* changed her course and moved sluggishly off across the wind. James Burnham, standing upright in one of the suspended boats, could see the sweat agleam on the face and arms of the fellow who wrestled with the *Polly's* wheel.

"Can ye drop me their helmsman, Jim?" asked Trimmer from the poop.

Burnham nodded, and extended his hand toward one of his companions in the swinging boat. A heavy pistol was placed in his fingers. He looked across at the other schooner, raised his arm, and fired. The fellow at the *Polly's* wheel slipped to the

deck with a scream and the *Polly* fell sluggishly back to her old course before the wind.

The three boats were lowered and pulled briskly away. The quartermaster's boat sprang into the lead and drew away from the others. James Burnham crouched in the bow of the second boat, sword in hand. All three pulled straight for the wounded vessel's larboard side.

At the instant of the quartermaster's boat touching the *Black Polly's* side Burnham, in the bows of the second boat, was not twenty feet away. He saw something black and red appear above the schooner's rail and fall, with a crash, into the quartermaster's boat. There were enough live pirates on the *Black Polly* to prepare and drop an explosive!

The crippled schooner rolled heavily, and, for a second or two, everything—water, men, oars, and boats—seemed to leap heavenward. A flopping shape fell within a yard of Burnham's head and plunged into the torn sea.

Burnham's boat drove onward across some

flimsy, sinking wreckage; and he jumped through the clinging smoke of the explosion to the *Polly's* shattered rail. As he leaped from the rail to the deck he drove his slender blade into a blackened breast that confronted him, wrenched it free, and sprang clear of the smoke.

Hicks's big guns had been overturned, his schooner riddled, his rogues cut to pieces when repulsed by the heroic brig; but still he had sixteen living men instead of three. It seemed to the boarders that corpses sprang from the scuppers, armed and alive, and that wounded men lay prone and slashed with knives and cutlases. The scattered battle eddied up and down and across the slippery, slanted deck. It was fought out in pairs and groups, blade to blade, toe to toe.

Owing to the loss of the quartermaster's boat and its entire company, the boarders did not outnumber the defenders by more than two or three; but Trimmer's men were fresh. To offset the freshness of the invaders, Hellfire Hicks himself was alive and practically unhurt.

Trimmer sailed once around the scene of action, cursing at the trick that had been played on him; and then, evidently satisfied in his mind that his men had the upper hand, he swung the *Wasp's* stern to the conflict and set off in pursuit of the brig. Some of the *Polly's* uninvited guests cursed like fiends upon seeing that their captain did not intend to send another boat to their help; but they fought all the more furiously for this knowledge.

James Burnham gave no thought to anything but the devilish work in hand. He undertook and dispatched three single engagements in masterly style and then came face to face with Hicks. He did not know the short, heavy-set fellow with the black beard and the brandished cutlas for the redoubtable pirate; but if it had been the evil one himself he would not have cared. He ran Hicks through the top of the right lung and passed on along the slippery deck. Twenty minutes later the last of the *Polly's* crew gave up his black soul through a red gash in his breast.

Of the twenty-eight who had left the white

schooner in the three boats, only eighteen had come over the *Polly's* rail. Of the eighteen, six now lay dead, seven sat or crawled upon the deck, grievously wounded, and five remained on their feet.

Of the five, only James Burnham and one other had escaped without a scratch. And yet Burnham had been the first over the rail, the first to kill, and the slayer of the terrific Hicks. His exploits had filled his comrades with wonder and admiration, his enemies with horror.

Now, with the long, straight blade held low before him, blood dripping slowly from the point, he led the way to the cabin. The four others who could walk followed him briskly and two of the grievously wounded crawled after, bleeding and groaning and cursing.

The poop deck was raised about four feet above the main deck, and three short steps in a hooded hatch led down to the cabin door and the level of the cabin deck. The door stood open. James Burnham entered and halted, staring into the gloom of the ill-lit apartment. The four crowded at his

shoulders. The wounded men dragged themselves down the steps, smearing the planks with their blood.

The cabin was long and narrow and lighted only by two small ports beneath the after coaming of the poop. Closed doors lined it on both sides. Burnham advanced a step or two, turned to the right, and pushed open one of the doors. It opened upon utter darkness and a smell of dried fruits. A pantry evidently.

He tried the next door and found it locked. The key was not in the lock. He smashed it open with his shoulder and stumbled into a narrow, clean, white berth well lit by a port. The fellows crowding on the threshold swore with astonishment and delight; and James Burnham steadied himself and stared into the eyes of a woman.

She was young and tall and generously proportioned. Her hair was black and of silken texture; her eyes were as dark and liquid as eddies in a deep river; her brow was smooth, and her glowing cheeks showed an artful bloom of white powder.

She wore a long robe of flowered silk, its open neck displaying the white pillar of her throat and a flake of her white breast; its short sleeves discovering her round white arms.

Her left hand was pressed to her bosom, and in her right hand she held a knife no thicker than a bodkin; but her eyes gave no sign of either fear or fury. A smile touched her crimson lips, and her gaze wavered from James Burnham's face. The tough rascals in the door openly swore their admiration.

Burnham bowed.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, my dear madam," he said. "May I make so bold as to ask you for the pretty toy in your hand—not your heart, madam, but the thing in your right hand? You have nothing to fear from the worthy mariners at my back. Like myself, your most humble and devoted servant, they are veritable lambs in the presence of a lady."

The woman looked at him wide-eyed, with even more than her former interest.

XI

YOU are of the—the quality, as you say it, captain?" queried the young woman, in halting English, but with perfect composure. "Is it not? I see it by your manner. You are the gentry, sir."

"A poor, disinherited gentleman of Berkshire, madam," replied Burnham.

"But he bain't the cap'n, for all his quality," said one of the fellows on the threshold with a gusty hoot of laughter.

Burnham turned upon the speaker slowly, with a droop of the lids and a harsh, sidling twist of the mouth. His eyes glinted.

"Did I hear anyone speak?" he asked softly. "Bolt, did you speak?"

Bolt was a strapping fellow of middle age, with small eyes and heavy jaws. He was one of the recruits from the mutineers and ranked high among them as a ruthless fighter.

"Ye heard me, Jim Burnham," he said, "unless ye be deaf. I be telling the wench that ye bain't the cap'n."

For a second or two he returned Burnham's glinting regard with an insolent glare; and then his eyes wavered, he shuffled his feet uneasily, and laughed unconvincingly. He lowered his gaze and stared at the heavy, besmeared cutlas in his hand.

"Perfectly true, I am not the captain," said James coolly; "but I am James Burnham, none the less, with the temper I was born with and a peculiar objection to bellowing calves of your kidney, Master Bolt. The truth is, you stick in my gullet like a lump of rotten beef. Come on deck, my hearty, and I'll be delighted to show you exactly what I think of you. There is room enough in the scuppers for one more corpse!"

He turned to the woman, who had listened to the dispute in silence and watched the faces of the men with a light of alert calculation in her dark eyes.

"I would invite you up to see the entertainment, but the deck is foul with blood," said Burnham.

"I care not for a little blood," she replied calmly. "I have seen much."

Bolt plunged the point of his cutlas at Burnham's abdomen; but Burnham had been watching him from the corner of one eye and twirled aside in the nick of time. The broad point went through the tongue of Burnham's leather belt, within an inch of his hip, and pinned him to the bulkhead. Before Bolt could withdraw it Burnham drove the point of his rapier into his assailant's right side, through and through.

Bolt sank with a scream, fell sidewise, and his blood spurted over the woman's feet and the hem of her silken robe. She had the grace to cringe back against the ship's side and cover her eyes with her hands.

Bolt was dead. The three in the doorway stared at the bulky corpse with astonishment and satisfaction depicted on their faces.

"He was allus treacherous, was Bolt," said one. "Mind how he ran his knife into Jersey Dick, mates? But he was strong with the captain."

"Aye, he was strong with Trimmer," said another, "an' he'd get the quartermaster's berth, sure's he's gone below, but for the fact as how he's dead. Treacherous, aye, and a bully!"

"That's him," said the third; "and he was the same afore he turned gentleman o' fortune. Handy with the iron, he was!"

James Burnham withdrew his sword from the dead body and stepped out into the main cabin. The woman followed him. The wounded men were still there; but one had ceased to crawl in his quest for treasure and lay flat on his face—dead. Burnham glanced around him, then went on deck; and the woman followed him close. The three other unwounded survivors of the boarding party remained below to break into the late Hellfire Hicks's treasure chests.

Burnham and the woman reached the deck just in time to behold the last plunge of the valiant brig. She went down head first, and the bright and lively seas danced over her grave.

The white schooner was approaching, her work

well done. She was not half a mile away, a beautiful thing of living white upon the still blue of the sky and the dancing blue of the sea, slanting gracefully in her long tack across the wind.

The woman placed both her hands on Burnham's arm, stood very close to him, and gazed up into his face.

"I regret you are not the captain," she said. "I like you; and it may be I do not like this Captain Trimmer so well. Captain Hicks tell me, when he shut me in my berth after he see your schooner, how it may be that Trimmer get me very soon. So when I see you my heart jump with joy and I say to myself that it is better."

"Trimmer is a very amiable and worthy person, I assure you," said Burnham, smiling. "But how came you into the hands of the late Captain Hicks, my beauty?"

"He take me from a ship one whole year ago," she replied. "He had much love for me for six month, and then not so much—but more than I have for him. He was the lover of many women—

and some not beautiful, as I see with my own eyes sometimes. He is good dead, I think—more than alive. How did he get his death?"

"I had the pleasure of giving it to him," replied Burnham coolly.

"Ah! You have the great courage, the heart of stone," she exclaimed. "My father was such—a soldier of France; but if he had been a pirate he could not have suffered contentment except he was the captain. And why is it not so with you? You kill that Hicks. You have the courage—the heart undismayed. I like you; and it may be I do not like Trimmer."

"You flatter me," said Burnham, laughing low and heartlessly. "My dear, I must stop my ears, else I'll get my gullet slit before my fortune is made. It is treason to listen to you. It is the captain who divides and distributes the spoils, giving this to one and that to another. But at least there will be no harm in taking one kiss—if you will give it."

She glanced up at him archly, neither consent

nor denial in her eyes. At that moment a boat put off from the white schooner, and Trimmer and eight men came aboard the *Polly*. The captain was in high spirits, for a quantity of bar silver had been found aboard the brig, together with wines of rare vintages and some manner of ecclesiastical dignitary. The unfortunate brig had been Spanish, and homeward bound from some rich port on the main. Although daunted for a moment by the sight of the dead on the black schooner's decks, and the thought of his short-handed condition, the sight of the young woman at James Burnham's side wrought Trimmer's immediate recovery.

From the condition of the *Black Polly's* hold and lazaretto, it was evident that Hicks had made a number of profitable captures since his last trip ashore for the purpose of caching his plunder. English, Spanish, and French gold coins to the value of two thousand guineas were found beneath the decking of the late commander's berth. Silks, set and unset jewels, and a sack of silver coins were found in the same hiding-place.

On the other hand, the provisions were low, the water was foul in the casks, and the last grain of gunpowder vanished. The hold was more than half filled with a jumble of all manner of merchandise.

After a thorough overhauling of the *Polly,* Trimmer put back to his own schooner with the woman and her personal belongings, the jewels, and the little bags of gold coins. The silver, some useful pistols and cutlases, and several boatloads of general merchandise followed in the transfer from schooner to schooner. Then the *Polly* was scuttled.

This affair had reduced the white schooner's company from forty-six to twenty-seven, including the wounded; but three of the Spanish sailors from the valiant brig had expressed their willingness to enlist with Captain Trimmer and were being held under consideration. These, with the young woman from the *Polly* and the ecclesiastic from the brig, swelled the list to thirty-two.

Captain Trimmer called a meeting just before

sunset of that busy day. All were present save the bishop—he was that, at least—and two of the wounded. The helmsman attended to the wheel and the meeting at one and the same time, while the cook stood in the door of the galley with one ear devoted to Captain Trimmer and the other to the boiling of his coppers. The young woman stood composedly at Trimmer's side, her smooth cheeks delicately aglow, her fine eyes languorously inquisitive. Half a dozen men, including Slim Sam, Wells, and James Burnham, stood close to these two. Burnham watched the woman covertly, with an ironic glimmer in his eyes.

John Trimmer was in fine feather. He cocked his hat and complimented his comrades on their luck in a few words. He then named the recent and lamented dead, and remarked that a slight degree of consolation might be derived from the fact that the fewer the survivors the larger the shares of the spoils. His audience expressed appreciation of his humor with blistering oaths and harsh hoots of laughter. He named the chief items of the plun-

der and said that the sharing would take place on the morrow. This, too, was well received.

Next he asked the company's pleasure as to the filling of the vacant berth of quartermaster. Some discussion followed in ragged whispers.

Burnham paid no attention to the question and seemed unconscious of the discussion and the glances which were shot at him. He moved away, turned his back on the captain and the company, and squared his elbows on the rail. He was coolly but elegantly attired and wore that murderous, straight rapier at his side in a scabbard of red Spanish leather.

"I says Jim Burnham!" cried a mahogany-faced fellow with a broken nose and a bandage around his head.

Another beauty gave voice at this in blasphemous protest. He did not approve of promoting a new hand and a stranger over the bloody heads of the tried and the true. He accused the gentleman of the broken nose of toadyism, and cast reflections on his ancestry.

A clamor arose, and the crowd closed and surged forward. It expanded as suddenly as it had contracted, every man jumping away from his neighbors on the right and left and at his back—and there on the deck lay the wine-inspired gentleman who had insulted him of the broken nose, writhing in his own blood.

The unfortunate debater was carried to his berth, and the business of the meeting was continued. Trimmer, entirely sober himself, felt that it was not the time to exact discipline. It was a novel feeling for him to have, and he wondered at it vaguely; for never before had he allowed an unauthorized knifing in his presence to pass without immediate and violent punishment. But now he went on with the business of electing a quartermaster.

Inquiring glances were turned upon him, the most piercing of which was from the small eyes of Slim Sam, first mate and second in command.

"Who says nay to James Burnham having the berth?" he asked.

If anyone felt disinclined to see Burnham pro-

moted, no one felt inclined to risk saying so. The man with the damaged nose glared around him hopefully, his red knife still in his hand; but nobody cared to invite a second exhibition of his prowess in debate.

"Mr. Burnham, this company of gentlemen of fortune has elected you to the berth and rank of quartermaster," Trimmer said. "This means that you rank as the junior officer. Mr. Nairn, third mate and boatswain, will instruct you in your duties. You fought like a hero to-day, Jim, and deserve the honor that has been bestowed upon you by your comrades."

A ragged cheer went up, after which the cook called all hands to supper. Burnham raised his hat and bowed to Trimmer, then turned and bowed to the crew. He was pleased, but he felt nothing in any way resembling gratitude.

For a fleeting moment he was conscious of a sharp disgust for Trimmer, the woman, the cheering ruffians, and himself; but the sensation was almost too brief to record itself on his brain. He

turned again to speak to John Trimmer; but the captain had vanished.

The new quartermaster went forward and ate his supper with the men. The first, second, and third mates and the gunner did the same. Welsh Owen, the possessor of the bandaged head and broken nose, drew the new officer's attention to the fact that he, Mr. Owen, had silenced all opposition to Mr. Burnham's election. The Welshman was not sober.

"I noticed it," replied Burnham, "and consider it very handsome of you; but may I ask why you did it?"

"Ye know two men when ye know me," said Welsh Owen ponderously. "Ye know one man when ye know me sober an' another when ye know me drunk. That's how ye see me now. Ye see the real William Owen now—only a bit knocked about. Sober, I'm an ordinary shellback—mighty ordinary. Man o' whims I am—and education. Admire a gentleman—even a bad one. Bad one myself, even

if I am a parson's son. Excuse me, I'll just lie down an' take a nap."

Slim Sam plucked Burnham by the sleeve and drew him away from the group squatting about the door of the galley. Burnham wondered, for though he had frequently felt the first mate's darkling glance upon him he had never before been addressed by him.

"Trimmer made a mistake," said the mate in a curiously thin and gentle voice. "He loosed his grip; he weakened. He let Welsh Owen go unpunished after the knifing, though yesterday he would have struck him down with his own hand. He is afraid; and, once a man shows fear of trouble, trouble courts him. It is the wench, doubtless. He is a fool about women. He turned a blind eye to Welsh Owen so's not to draw attention to himself and the woman. It is against the rules of our company to keep women aboard this schooner—and a wise rule, too!"

"And yet the incident seemed to pass unremarked," replied Burnham.

"Ye're wrong, sir," returned the ex-pickpocket. "It escaped nobody. To-morrow ye'll see. The captain will put her ashore—unless he is quite mad. Otherwise? Well, a new captain."

Burnham distrusted Slim Sam. He saw that the fellow was hinting something beneath his words—inviting questions—offering something. But Burnham had learned caution of late. He pretended stupidity.

"I don't know your rules," he said. "Who is the woman? Where did Hicks get her, I wonder? Is she French or Spanish?"

The first mate smiled. He seemed to be bent upon humoring this new quartermaster.

"You are younger than I am," he said tenderly; "but I was never a squire of dames. I never attracted them; and I was only a poor man, a bookseller's clerk, before—my trouble. But I can tell you about this woman. She is called Hélène da Silva, and is generally supposed to be the daughter of a French freebooter who sailed and was hanged under the name of Saint-Ovide, and of a Spanish

lady of degree. She is not unknown. I have heard songs about her in more than one port. She is a sort of queen of her kind—a bird of paradise among fowl of her feather. Hicks went ashore and besieged a town for her, and took her from the governor, having first killed the governor."

James Burnham slept lightly that night. For the first time since joining the white schooner's company he felt that he was not safe from the treacherous whim or secret grudge of a shipmate. Discipline had relaxed for the first time since his joining. He had seen Welsh Owen knife a man in a fit of drunken rage and go unpunished. A spirit of unrest and uncertainty was in the air. The strong fingers of John Trimmer were relaxed for the moment.

So James slept lightly, with his hand on the haft of his knife. He congratulated himself on his luck when he awoke in the same world in which he had fallen asleep.

Captain Trimmer appeared early, gorgeously attired, and informed the company that the sacra-

ment and ceremony of marriage would be performed in half an hour's time by his reverence, the Spanish bishop. The gentlemen of fortune received the glad news sullenly. They were heavy of head and stomach. They were in no mood for jokes or sentiment. They had seen the hand of their captain falter. They were disillusioned.

They stared gloomily at their commander, reflecting that life was no joke for them, whatever it might be for him. He had taken no wound yesterday, they told themselves; but he had taken Hellfire Hicks's mistress and wardrobe without so much as by your leave to the stout lads who had done the bloody work on the *Black Polly's* deck.

Trimmer was quick to see the trouble. He knew that he had been guilty of a grave mistake in not having struck Welsh Owen to the deck at the time of the knife-play. But he pretended to see nothing critical or unusual in the attitude of his comrades. He bowed, waved a hand, and went below.

"The wench has made a monkey of him already," muttered Wells.

Trimmer soon reappeared, this time dragging the Spanish bishop at his heels. Behind the faint and reluctant prelate came Hélène, gowned in silk, wonderful and distracting to behold.

"The man's a fool," muttered Wells to Burnham. "He has gone mad overnight. He is holding a candle to the powder this minute."

The unfortunate ecclesiastic had been forcibly attired in his hot and costly robes of office. He was an old man, sore stricken with fever and terror. He slipped limply from the captain's arms to the deck. Trimmer lifted him to his feet again—and, behold, he was dead!

It was a capital joke. Trimmer laughed uproariously, but keen ears detected a note of apprehension in his laughter. No one else joined in his mirth. They were in so evil a mood that their eyes were blinded even to the humor of a dead bishop.

Oaths were muttered. James Burnham smiled ironically. Somebody sneered. The beautiful young woman, unmoved by the fate of the aged

prelate, glanced toward the sullen company and turned pale with apprehension.

Trimmer ceased his laughter and began to glare. A volley of astounding oaths burst from him. He drew a brace of pistols from the pockets of his flowered silk coat. His mood, too, had become dangerous.

Slim Sam, rustily garbed and apparently unarmed, approached him with a conciliating smile on his narrow face and a humble stoop to his thin shoulders. He whispered a few words. Trimmer listened, still glaring. The first mate whispered again, this time at considerable length. Captain Trimmer snorted; he gnawed his lip; he swore.

"What is this?" he cried suddenly. "Am I not your captain? Is it not in my power to break rules as well as to make them? Put her ashore, d'ye say? Who won ye free from death on the plantations? Who put gold into yer dirty pockets for ye? Tell me that!"

His square, coarse face was convulsed with rage. Rage gripped his throat until his voice stuck in it

with a gasping gurgle. He brandished his pistols. But the whispering voice of Slim Sam went on at his ear. He choked. He lowered his pistols and listened again.

"Let it be so!" he cried at last. "I stand by the rules; but, ye white-livered spawn of the gutter, I've learned my lesson! One o' ye broke a rule yesterday; but because we are short-handed I spared him. The like will never happen again."

The schooner's course was changed; and, three days later, Hélène was put ashore in a little lawless port unknown to honest mariners. Other treasure went ashore there also and into secret places. Fresh water was taken aboard, and, after four days of carousing in that spot that looked like heaven, but which was, in fact, nearer hell than any place on earth, the dangerous company put to sea for another cruise.

XII

THE governor of Nevis had given up hope of finding his friend James Burnham and had decided that he had left the island by the time the *Tartar* let go her anchors in the harbor.

The battery on the hill and the little war-vessel in the basin exchanged salutes. Then the sloop's commander, accompanied by the senior of his two lieutenants and three very small midshipmen, came ashore to pay his respects to Captain Nash. The governor had a dozen of the officers of the garrison in attendance and young Mr. Willis.

Mr. Willis looked paler, thinner, and brighter of eye than ever. He had been working hard over Percy Stanton—harder than there was need for, perhaps; and the beautiful Miss Kitty had been his faithful assistant on the case. To practice all one's skill to save a person from death whom one would gladly have dead is a cruel strain on one's nervous

system. So Willis found it—for he was desperately in love with Kitty Trimmer.

Slight indications of polite astonishment escaped the gentlemen of the governor's suite upon the entrance of the gentlemen from the sloop. His excellency himself showed signs of agitation. Presentations were made, and greetings and introductions were exchanged.

Lieutenant Alexander Burnham was puzzled by the glances of astonishment, inquiry, and keen interest which were shot at him from every eye. He was embarrassed, and his manner indicated the state of his mind. He wondered what could be wrong with him. Was his face dirty? Had he left some lather on it after his early and hurried shave? Was he improperly dressed? What the mischief were people staring at?

Alexander Burnham differed physically from his brother James only in facial expression and the tint and quality of his eyes. There was nothing sardonic in Alexander's appearance, though the lines of his chin, jaw, and brow were amazingly like the

lines of his brother's profile. His eyes were dark-blue, direct and open in their glance, warm alike in kindness and in anger. The expression of his mouth, in repose, was grave, but kindly.

From the chin to the soles of the feet Alexander resembled James as one pea resembles another from the same pod. The same long, straight limbs, well muscled and well boned; the narrow hips, flat flanks, and trim waists; the deep chests and straight, broad shoulders—I doubt if their own mother could have distinguished the one from the other save by their faces.

But the natures of the brothers differed as day differs from night, save in the matter of the unflinching courage of their breed. Alexander was both honest and honorable, kind of heart, quick of sympathy. He was shy and modest concerning his own attainments; and, at the same time, he possessed a very lively sense of self-respect and a still more lively respect for his family, past and present.

The governor drew Lieutenant Burnham aside at the first opportunity, laid a kindly hand on the

sailor's arm, and gazed into the flushed and honest face with unmistakable signs of agitation.

"He has gone," whispered his excellency. "The poor lad has gone!"

Alexander stared, wondering if the old gentleman had suffered from the sun.

"You have not heard?" queried Nash. "Your brother—he has gone."

The color went out of Alexander Burnham's face and his arm twitched.

"My brother!" he said blankly. "What brother, sir? I have three."

"James," replied the governor, pressing the young man's arm with his fat fingers and staring up anxiously into his face. "Don't think that I had anything to do with his flight, for Heaven's sake! He knew that you were coming. I showed him Scovil's letter. He seemed overjoyed at the prospect of meeting you again; but, almost immediately, he was forced into a quarrel with a young man named Stanton. They fought, but I knew nothing of it, of course, until James had pinked his man and gone

away. He thought he had killed Stanton—and doubtless he felt that he had abused my hospitality. In fact, he was advised to flee by his second. That hurt me—for I would have stood his friend through thick and thin. I am fond of him, and so is my daughter. He did me a great service once, a service I shall never forget. He saved my girl's life. He left a letter behind him for Elizabeth—very pathetic, very poetic, honest, and manly. He mentioned youthful follies, unworthiness, and hopeless love in the letter. But he is gone, and I can't find him."

Lieutenant Burnham was dazed, and he looked it. Wonder, doubt, suspicion, shame, and apprehension shook brain and heart and obscured thought. He gaped at the governor. He felt the eyes of the entire company upon him. In spite of the turmoil of his emotions and the dazed state of his mind, he suddenly felt a little throb of relief at the thought that James had departed before the *Tartar's* arrival —if, that is, James had ever been here.

"An impostor!" he exclaimed. "Surely an impostor! James sailed for Kingston, in Jamaica,

and arrived at that port. I heard it from my father, sir. There can be no mistake about that. Did this —this gentleman—tell you he was James Burnham, a son of Sir Walter Burnham?"

"He did," replied Captain Nash, with more composure than he had yet displayed. "He did, sir; but I was aware of his father's name before he told me anything about himself. He was ill—he came to us ill, yet as a hero—and Willis and I saw his back when we were getting him into bed. I had heard of your worthy father's whim for marking his children even as he marks his silver, and so I knew the stranger for a Burnham of Burnham at a glance. True, an impostor might have his shoulder marked so for the very purpose of imposing on people; but our friend James is of your height, of your weight and size, I swear; and as like you in face, save for the color of his eyes, as one round shot is like another. You are pale, sir! I did not mean to administer a shock, sir, upon my soul! I'm a blundering old fool. Take my arm, lad. Come to the open air."

"Really, your excellency, it is nothing," said Alexander. "The sun of yesterday, perhaps. I was shaken a little at your news—for a moment. I thought James safe in Jamaica, engaged in commerce. He—he and my father had a slight disagreement before he left home. He is inclined to be headstrong—at least so I gathered from what my father told me. I am anxious about James."

Alexander Burnham returned to his ship with apprehension still awake in him, but the emotion of bewilderment dominating his mind. Why had the black goat of his family come to Nevis? And how was it possible that he had won Captain Nash's friendship as well as his gratitude?

Could it be that his father had been mistaken in his reading of James's character, and had made a cruel blunder in his treatment of him? He could not bring himself to believe this of Sir Walter, for the baronet was as just as he was hard. Alexander was sorely puzzled.

Mr. Willis came aboard the *Tartar* later in the day, dined with the officers in the narrow, low-

roofed apartment which served as both wardroom and gun-room, and afterward sat on the tiny quarter-deck with Alexander Burnham and talked about James Burnham.

Alexander was careful not to show anything more than a brotherly anxiety in his questions. But few questions were required to start Willis and to keep him talking. That he admired James Burnham was evident to the other and soothed Alexander's strong family pride.

Willis told of the arrival of James out of the unknown, fainting but heroic and victorious, with the rescued girl in his arms and the misguided New Englanders at his heels. He talked of James as he had known him after his days of illness—always ready to help others, always polite and cheerful. He touched lightly on his charming, devotional, yet delicate attitude toward Elizabeth Nash. He described the duel, the cause of which he did not know. He described it at length, in glowing terms. It was very evident that the young surgeon admired

Mr. James Burnham as greatly as he despised Mr. Stanton.

Alexander, listening keenly, and keenly apprehensive for the honor of the family, could find no fault with his brother's behavior in the duel. This puzzled him more than ever, though he was pleased. He knew James for a rascal at heart and the sorest disgrace the family had known in six generations; and yet the fellow had come to Nevis, stripped of all his worldly gear, and had behaved like a Christian and a gentleman. The rogue was clever beyond a doubt; and Alexander was conscious of a throb of pride.

Alexander Burnham went ashore in the evening and called again on Captain Nash. The governor could talk of nothing but James—the lost James. He told the story of his daughter's rescue again and again.

On his way down to the water-front Alexander ran foul of a number of adventuring military gentlemen. They took him in hand in spite of his protests. They plied him with rum punches in a favor-

ite resort of theirs, through the wide windows of which the trade-wind always blows with a swishing of foliage and a hum of surf. They informed him that his brother James was a very great man; and from their somewhat mixed and aimless conversation he learned that Kitty Trimmer was on the island.

Now it happened that he had heard of Kitty and of James's early affair with the daughter of the tailor of Wantage. His festive friends told him that Stanton was to marry Kitty; so he put two and two together and guessed something of the cause of the trouble between James and Stanton.

He felt discouraged, for the governor had told him of James's love for Elizabeth Nash. He saw that James was the same old James, the same rascal —only cleverer, perhaps.

Alexander Burnham went aboard the sloop and lay awake for a long time. Before closing his eyes he prayed that his duties in the islands might never bring him face to face with his precious brother.

When Elizabeth Nash first met Alexander Burn-

ham she lost color, swayed, and laid a hand on her father's arm for support; but her fine eyes brightened with a wonderful light at the back of them. This was the romantic being that she had built of gratitude and admiration in her deep heart about the person of James Burnham. This was James as she had dreamed of him at night, not as she had seen him in the white light of day and the yellow light of candles.

The sailor's blue eyes dwelt kindly, even tenderly, upon her face as he took her extended hand in his strong grasp.

During the week that followed their first meeting the governor's daughter and Alexander Burnham met daily. They rode together along the sands and upon the hills in the clean, cool hours of morning and evening. They sat in shaded and beflowered gardens side by side. At first the girl would talk of James, describing his valor and his unfailing good nature, and the sadness that always lurked behind his smile; but in a day or two she ceased to speak of him.

So a week went past; and then Commander Scovil decided that it was his duty to put to sea and hunt for pirates. The sloop was to sail at daybreak. Alexander went ashore on the eve of sailing, just as the stars began to appear on the purple overhead and the white sea-fire to burn in the purple under-keel, and went up to Government House. He found Elizabeth in her own rose-garden alone. They walked the narrow, sanded paths for several minutes in silence side by side.

"We are to sail in the morning," he said suddenly.

"My father has told me," she replied.

"We expect to be back in two weeks," he said.

She moved aside and seated herself on a bench of gray stone. He stood before her bareheaded, his cocked hat under his left arm. The star-shine touched the gold lace of his coat, the silver hilt of his sword, the buckles of his shoes. The elfin light swam in her eyes until they shone like stars.

"Do you love James?" he asked, his voice very tender and unsteady.

"No," she replied, the star-shine shimmering in her eyes.

"Did you love him?"

"Yes—for an hour, after first reading his letter."

His shoulders moved with the sigh of relief that escaped him.

"I am glad of that," he said. "James is a brave man; but—well, he is no more worthy of your—of a woman's—love than most men are."

"Are men so unworthy?" she asked, with a flicker of white lids upon starlit eyes and a twitch of her perfect lips. "They all seem brave and honorable and wondrous polite to me."

"We are well enough in our way, I have no doubt," he said gravely; "but—but you would not understand. Most of us are brave, and, if we happen to be gentlemen, we have good manners; but—well, I talk like a fool. You will forgive me, I hope. You are kind."

He stooped suddenly, lifted her right hand, and pressed his lips to it. He let it fall, turned and walked swiftly away.

Elizabeth raised her hand close to her eyes and looked at the back of it. She returned it to her lap and sat motionless for many minutes, gazing straight in front of her. Soon she began to laugh softly; and finally, reflecting on the dangers of pirate-hunting and the queerness of mankind, she fell to weeping.

Ten days after the sloop-of-war's departure from Nevis a small trader came in with English mails from Barbados. Among the governor's letters was one from Sir Walter Burnham. It was a caution and a disclosure in one, short and to the point. It was heartless and just.

Captain Nash read it slowly again and again with staring eyes and purpling face. At last he burned it, rubbed the black flakes to powder under his foot, swore, drew a deep breath and marched off in search of Elizabeth. Directed by a servant, he found her in the rose-garden, seated where Alexander Burnham had last seen her. He sat down beside her, breathing heavily, and took her hand.

She looked at him with inquiry, then dismay,

then terror in her eyes. Had he received some disastrous word of the *Tartar?*

"Do you love James Burnham?" asked the governor.

The color flooded back to her cheeks and life to her eyes.

"No," she said.

The governor's manner changed, and he looked confused as well as relieved. He kissed her and got heavily but hurriedly to his feet.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed; and then, continuing with less energy: "He was a brave man and I owe him much; but he is—wild—too devilish wild."

"Did Alexander tell you so?" she asked in startled tones.

"Alexander? No. His father, Sir Walter, wrote me," he replied.

The *Tartar* returned to the little harbor after two weeks spent in a fruitless search for gentlemen of fortune. By this time Percy Stanton had recovered sufficiently from his wound to walk abroad for short distances. But Willis continued to attend him daily,

and daily to meet Kitty Trimmer, for Stanton had been removed to Major Black's quarters as soon as he was convalescent.

Kitty had nursed her wealthy and wounded lover devotedly, and it was rumored that the two would marry in the course of the next few months and return to England. Stanton continued to keep the affair from the ears of his ambitious family. He felt confident that he would be able to make his peace with them after his marriage.

Alexander Burnham put on his best clothes, hastened up to Government House and paid his respects to Captain Nash and Elizabeth. His honest blue eyes warmed at sight of the girl; but otherwise he let no sign escape him of the great thing that glowed in his heart. They were the best of friends, as any one could see with half an eye. Neither of them mentioned the questions he had asked so boldly and she had answered so honestly that starlit night.

The governor was in no haste to inform Alexander that he had heard particulars of the past career of the precious James; but he felt it his duty to do

this, and at last he invited the sailor into his office and told him about Sir Walter's letter.

Alexander's face grew white, then red as fire.

"It is true, sir," he said. "I should have told you myself, I suppose; but you seemed fond of him, he had done no harm here—and, after all, he is my own brother. I do not deny that my father had to send him away from England; but I had no wish to blacken his name and my own on this island, where he evidently comported himself like a man of heart and breeding. The story is now common property, I imagine; and doubtless you will be glad to see as little of any Burnham as possible in the future."

"What d'ye mean?" roared Nash. "D'ye think I'd circulate the story? And d'ye think I'd hold the sins of one brother against another? Lad, you are welcome to my house every day and every hour."

Alexander thanked his excellency somewhat gloomily and wished him good day. His pride of name and blood was cut deep. Nash was sorry for him! Elizabeth pitied him! Pity was an emotion which he had no ambition to inspire in any breast.

XIII

ALEXANDER BURNHAM kept away from Government House for several days. Shame made him bitter and suspicious. It was hard enough, he reflected, to know himself that James was a cheat and a thief; but to have others know it made it seem a hundred times more shameful and more hard to bear.

This is where he suffered for his acute family pride. A skeleton in the closet is a depressing possession; but when the door of the closet has been opened to the public gaze the situation becomes worse than depressing. Alexander felt that the door of the Burnham skeleton-closet now stood open to the astonished and delighted gaze of the public of Nevis.

Being convinced of this fact, he spent all his leisure in looking for proof of it—a foolish and illogical proceeding. He weighed and questioned every word and glance of his messmates and of the gentlemen ashore. He thought of Elizabeth Nash

in a bitter misery of spirit. That pearly dome of dream had crashed back upon his heart at the first realization of his shameful position.

Alexander's watchfulness went unrewarded for several days; and then, as luck would have it, he met Mr. Stanton. Although Stanton's wound was now thoroughly healed, the unfortunate duelist was not fully recovered from the effects of it. His face was thin and white, and his legs were a trifle wabbly; but his eyes were clearer than they had been in years, thanks to his enforced abstinence from wines and punches of late.

The two met in that pleasant resort on the waterfront where the sea-wind and the music of the surf flooded in all day long at the open windows and doors. As luck would have it, Stanton was celebrating his first day of freedom from the irksome authority of Mr. Willis and Dr. Hamm.

When Alexander Burnham entered the room with one of the reefers from the sloop he beheld a company of six seated at a round table, with a huge punch-bowl in their midst, and at another table Mr.

Willis, Captain Cross, and Mr. Morton. He bowed to the company at large and went over to Cross's table, with the midshipman at his heels.

He knew Cross, Morton, Willis, and all the young men at the larger table, with the exception of Stanton. Before accepting the seat at the smaller table, which Captain Cross was quick to offer to him, he treated the captain and the other two gentlemen each to a searching glance; but he failed to detect anything of embarrassment or aloofness in their eyes or their manners. So he and the little reefer sat down, and each ordered a glass of wine.

Several of the men at the other side of the room shouted the names of Alexander and the midshipman, lifted their brimming glasses of punch, and drank to the sailors' healths. The sailors speedily returned the compliment.

Stanton, attracted by the mention of the name of Burnham, sat back in his chair and stared across at Alexander with owlish but insolent eyes and a sneering mouth; but Alexander, who was looking at Cross, did not see it.

"Stanton is at it again," said Cross. "Is it safe, Willis?"

"He is out of my hands now," replied the young surgeon. "Let him die his own death—a hoggish death—if he's determined to kill himself. Mr. Burnham, your very good health!"

A disturbance arose at the other table. Stanton had swallowed three glasses of punch in rapid succession, and, after his period of weakness and abstinence, each glass had shot its valiant fumes straight into his empty head. His head rang with rum and the name of Burnham. He did not approve of that name; and he felt very brave. Burnham! To the Inferno with all the Burnhams not already there! He tried to get on his feet, but the men on his right and left held him in his chair.

"You, there!" he shouted, struggling with his friends. "You, Burnham; I've got a word for your private ear!"

A hand was laid over his foolish mouth, but he dashed it savagely aside and continued to bawl at the other table.

"Where's your precious brother, my fine Sir Sucking Admiral?" he bellowed. "Gone away—what? Gone to earth, hey? Why was he chased out of London; can you tell me that?"

Alexander Burnham did not move leg or arm, but a tremor passed over his face and the muscles at the back of his neck twitched. Captain Cross jumped to his feet in anger.

"Back to your quarters, sir!" he roared. "Away with you, you sot—you fool! D'ye hear me? Obey instantly, or I'll have you broken! Wilson, Bridge, take him back to barracks. He has disgraced the regiment and the service. March!"

Stanton went, muttering and staggering, but cowed to the bottom of his flabby heart by the captain's threat. A shamefaced subaltern went on either side of him, supporting him and propelling him with a violence that threatened to pull his arms out of joint in several places. But for his recent illness they would have kicked him.

"The whole regiment will apologize to you for this," exclaimed Cross, turning to Burnham. "A

more cowardly and despicable attack, a more gratuitous insult, I never heard. The fool! He forced your brother to fight with him, was fairly beaten, and now slanders his opponent and tries to dirty his name—and to you! But the fool was drunk. Otherwise he'd never have ventured to open his mouth."

By the flushed faces and muttered words of the others it was evident that all agreed with Captain Cross. One by one they shook hands with Alexander. Alexander was deeply moved.

"Mr. Stanton was drunk," he said, "and but recently recovered from an illness; so I promise you that I will forget the incident without loss of time. You have behaved very handsomely, gentlemen, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Captain Cross, I thank you for your splendid indignation in behalf of my—of a member of my family. Gentlemen one and all, your humble servant. Boy, bring a dozen of claret—or shall it be a fresh brew of punch, gentlemen?"

Alexander went up to Government House that evening and told his excellency of Stanton's at-

tack. He wanted to know, very naturally, how Percy had come by his information concerning James.

Captain Nash charged furiously about the room and swore. He swore that Stanton had learned nothing from him or his. He swore that he had never been so insulted in all his life before as by Alexander's unjust, unkind, and altogether indescribable suspicion. He swore that he had thought better of Alexander. He swore that, but for his official position, his love for his motherless child, and his old liking for Alexander himself, he would call Alexander out for it. And then he swore some more.

Alexander saw that he had made a serious mistake, and said as much. He begged the furious old sea-dog's pardon, left his deepest respects for Miss Nash, and beat a retreat.

"It's the Trimmer girl, of course," he told himself. "I'm a fool not to have thought of that before. I have damned myself beyond hope with the Nashes!"

After days of artful maneuvering on his part, Alexander managed to meet Kitty Trimmer alone. The meeting was utterly unexpected on her part. Alexander stepped out from the cover of a manchineel-bush and confronted her. She was mounted on her pony.

She uttered a sharp cry and made as if she would spur her mount from the trail; but he raised his hand with a gesture that halted her. He looked at her steadily, with hard eyes and a grim face, and neither lifted his hat nor bowed.

"My girl," he said coldly, "you may remember me. I am Alexander Burnham, of Burnham. You, I know, are Kitty Trimmer, of Wantage. I have a few words to say to you on the subject of my brother James. Kindly tell Mr. Stanton that, if I hear any more talk in this island of my brother's unfortunate past, the effect will be disastrous to himself and to you. I will have him out and kill him; and I will strip you of your fine, false plumes, my girl. That is all."

Alexander avoided the governor and Elizabeth

until his excellency at last pocketed his official dignity and went aboard the sloop to come to an understanding with the sailor. Each apologized to the other half a dozen times. They shook hands as often; and at last they went ashore together and up to Government House arm in arm.

Their friendship was an assured thing; but Alexander was not happy. He could not rid himself of the idea that much of the governor's kindness to him was inspired by pity—by pity for him because his name was Burnham. It was a hard pill for Alexander to swallow.

Half an hour later, when he sat in the garden with Elizabeth, his mind and heart were poisoned toward her with the same thought. For she, too, was very kind. A Burnham wants to be admired by the woman he loves, not pitied by her. Alexander could not deny, even to himself, that he loved Elizabeth.

The *Tartar* went out of the little harbor again at an early hour of the morning on another cruise in search of pirates.

Captain Trimmer had recovered his old mastery over his uncertain and whimsical gentlemen of fortune by a series of splendid captures, murders, robberies, and scuttlings off the coast of Trinidad. Every gentleman of his company was now well along on the road to wealth. By discreet but constant recruiting from the crews of his prizes, he had built up his company to a selected force of one hundred and twenty of the hardest and most reckless rascals unhanged.

Trimmer's affairs were in this prosperous condition when he boarded the schooner *Le Diable* on a misty night and took her, with no damage to either of the vessels, but with much loss of life on the part of *Le Diable's* crew.

The master and owner of the schooner, who had died suddenly and violently, had been a Canadian of noble blood and a craving for profitable adventure. As his mother country was at war with England, he had built and manned *Le Diable* on the St. Lawrence, and had set out to serve France with one hand and fill his pockets with the other. He had

met with successes off Newfoundland, off New England, off the Carolinas, the Bahamas, and Bermuda. Off Antigua he had been chased by an English sloop-of-war, but had managed to drop her, and now he lay dead on the deck. He had accomplished very little for the glory of the king of France and even less for himself.

A sudden death is apt to upset even the subtlest calculations and nullify the most amazing successes. But it would seem that the dead Canadian had done Captain John Trimmer a very good turn. John thought so, and felt a positive glow of gratitude; but John was wrong.

Captain Trimmer inspected *Le Diable* and her treasure, and was delighted with both. The Canadian schooner was as like the white schooner as a twin sister in all but the color of her graceful hull. It was this fact, together with the somewhat overmanned condition of the white schooner, and the twenty new prisoners whose fate had not yet been determined, that set a germ of ambition in Trimmer's mind into full life and size.

Why should he, John Trimmer, share the toll of the rich and narrow seas with such blunderers as Deck and Duval? Had not Hellfire Hicks already been swept from his path? Why should he not reap the harvest and harry the other harvesters with two ships instead of one? The personal risk would be no greater; he would acquire wealth almost twice as fast, and soon be in a position to retire and live in England like a squire.

Meanwhile, he would be the greatest gentleman of fortune afloat. He possessed the brains and courage, the men, and now the ships. Hélène would see that he was a much greater man than the late Hicks. His vanity glowed. So he called his officers into the after-cabin of *Le Diable* and laid his plans before them.

Slim Sam trod lightly on James Burnham's toe beneath the table, then smoothly opposed the captain's suggestion of carrying on his activities in two hulls. Trimmer flared; but the first mate calmed him by saying that he objected to the plan because of its one and only weak spot. Could

Captain Trimmer be aboard two vessels at once? No. Then how was the second vessel to be successfully operated?

Each schooner would need a leader. They had the ships, the guns, and the men; but had they more than one capable leader? No. This being so, he, the first mate, was in favor of keeping to their present arrangements and their small but safe winnings.

Trimmer was pleased with his first officer's tribute, but was not weakened in his intentions. He requested Mr. Burnham's opinion. James replied that he considered the idea of monopolizing the business in these waters to be a splendid one and worthy of his friend Jack; but he feared that the second schooner might fail to keep up to the white schooner's high standard of efficiency. Better stick to the one ship, he said.

Captain Trimmer did not ask Wells to speak. He banged the table with his fist and called Slim Sam and Burnham silly old women. Then, after a great deal of talk, now violent, now calm, now

threatening, and now pleading, he talked them around to his own views of his ambitious plan. Then he thumped Slim Sam on the back and named him for commander of the second schooner.

Slim Sam jumped under the captain's heavy hand and wriggled away from the honor of commanding *Le Diable*. He was no sort of fighting man, he protested. He humbly suggested that James Burnham should command the new schooner.

This was finally agreed to by Trimmer, Wells, and the others, and James accepted the honor with seeming reluctance.

All the officers save Wells returned to the white schooner, leaving a strong guard aboard the prize. They had wines and rum up from the lazaretto and sat around the cabin-table until dawn arranging the details of management of the expanded business.

The two vessels were to work separately and as far apart as they might see fit; but once in each period of three months the new schooner was to put in at one or more of Trimmer's three secret havens and leave a report and her plunder.

Trimmer was to have the lion's share of the winnings of the new vessel, as well as of the old. Both were to keep a sharp lookout for Major Deck and Duval, and attack either of these rivals if they saw fair chances of success. In a year's time they were to meet in the most secluded of their three retreats and, if advisable at the time, make a final division of all spoils, and then scatter.

There were twelve other minor clauses in the agreement. Trimmer, Burnham, and the other leaders swore to abide by the terms of the agreement with oaths that might well have brought withering fire from heaven upon their ungodly heads.

In the morning the plan was roughly explained to all the men save those who were with Wells and the Canadian prisoners aboard the prize. The hardy ruffians cheered. Captain Trimmer asked for fifty volunteers to sail with Mr. Burnham. Every man of the company volunteered to go with the new commander. This was a slap in the face for Trimmer; but he grinned as if he liked it and set to work to select the fifty himself.

Burnham, Slim Sam, and the fifty went aboard *Le Diable,* and Wells and the guard returned to the white schooner. All sail was made on both vessels, and they drew steadily away from each other.

James had his twenty prisoners lined up before him, inspected them, threatened them with the plank, and then won their gratitude by enlisting them all. Slim Sam was his first mate; and together they appointed Welsh Owen second mate, George Tizard third mate and boatswain, a quartermaster, two gun-captains, and the lad Henry Todd to the post of gunner's mate.

"We are well rid of that wooden-headed peacock, Trimmer," said Slim Sam to Burnham, rubbing his thin hands together.

James glanced at him from under a drooped lid, smiled, but did not speak. The two retired to the cabin and looked over a chart. At noon James found the schooner's position. He had learned the science of navigation from Wells. Then *Le Diable's* course was altered.

Two days later *Le Diable* splashed an anchor in

a secluded harbor, and the work of painting her hull snow-white to the water-line was commenced. Her name was painted out and she was touched up cleverly here and there so as to look exactly like Trimmer's schooner. She soon put to sea again, and immediately set about adding to the terrible reputation of the *Wasp*.

Slim Sam treated James Burnham with the utmost friendliness and respect; and while he patted James with the palm of his hand, figuratively speaking, he constantly slapped the absent Trimmer with the back of it.

He talked a great deal about John Trimmer. He was sorry to have to confess that Trimmer was not only a hog, but a dishonest hog. Trimmer thought of nothing but lining his own nest. He distrusted John Trimmer; and so on, and so on.

XIV

THE white schooner's reputation grew by leaps and bounds. Seamen called her the *Wasp* and cursed her as they named her. The evil one was aboard her surely, for yesterday she was seen off St. Vincent and to-day she was reported off Martinique. Major Deck and Duval were not worth worrying about now that this white menace was darting from one end of that terror-stricken sea to the other at a speed that no mortal vessel could accomplish.

The governor of Nevis and Commander Scovil believed only one-quarter of what they heard, but the *Tartar* got her anchor up again and sailed out on her third cruise. She had drawn blanks twice; but this time she drew Major Deck. A short fight followed a long chase. The *Tartar* put back to Nevis with the material for a score of hangings ironed in her hold and her own wounded in the cockpit. Alexander Burnham, who had been seriously wounded in the neck while boarding Deck's

schooner, was carried straight up to Government House by his excellency's orders.

Thanks to the skill of Mr. Willis and the care of Elizabeth Nash, Alexander was on his feet again within two weeks of the fight. But he had to thank Elizabeth for more than his health. He had confessed his love for her, fearfully, humbly.

Well, she loved him! She told him frankly that she did not care a snap of the fingers about his family disgrace in the person of James. She loved him, not his family. She said that if all his brothers took to dishonest ways, and his father to piracy, she would continue to love him.

Alexander was deeply moved and felt grateful to the fellow who had slashed him in the neck and so, indirectly, had brought about this sweet understanding. But, in spite of his joy, his family pride prompted him to point out to her that it was scarcely possible for more than one member of a family of the Burnhams' position in the world to fall from grace in the same century.

He also explained that poor James, though a disgrace to the Burnhams of Burnham, would be a

credit to many families for his courage and good manners alone. Family loyalty was so strong in the sailor that he could not overlook it, even at the moment of Elizabeth's confession of love. Elizabeth understood, and loved him the more for it.

While Alexander healed his neck and his heart at Government House, the *Tartar* sailed away without him on her fourth quest for pirates. Two days out from Nevis, south bound, Commander Scovil awoke one morning to find a large brig on the horizon to windward. He knew her for a war-ship at a glance, and a second glance convinced him that she was a French twenty-two.

The *Tartar* carried four light guns to a broadside, two heavy guns forward and two aft. She was a large sloop, and formidable as a sloop; but she was intended for hunting pirates, not for fighting men-o'-war. So the reefs were let out of her huge mainsail, her topsails were spread, and every head-sail was run up. The two dipping, swaying vessels were blown merrily across the ruffled sea under a blue and fleckless sky; and it soon became apparent that the larger vessel was being blown a little the faster.

The brig had the heels of the sloop, but the chase promised to be a long one. Several hours before noon a third sail appeared on that vast stage, this one over the shimmering horizon to leeward. It grew swiftly, working up the wind toward the chase. To Scovil's anxious glass it soon disclosed itself as a schooner, low and spotless, white of hull, and heavily sparred.

The schooner came on until she was within half a mile of the sloop. Then she swung to the right and fled away across the wind. The curious and anxious watchers aboard the *Tartar* could see the gaily besashed and armed fellows on her long decks and the gleam of the big, unjacketed gun in her bows.

"It is that confounded *Wasp,* as I live!" exclaimed Scovil to a middy at his elbow. "We've found her at last; but I fear me we'll derive little satisfaction from the discovery. She'll hang off and on to watch the fun, I suppose; but there'll be no pickings for her after the Frenchman has done with us."

"The Frenchman has to catch us before he can

pluck us, sir," replied the hopeful and courageous reefer. "And maybe, even if he does catch us, he'll find our feathers hard to pull."

Scovil patted the lad kindly on the shoulder.

"Something may turn up," he said with a smile. "If nothing else does, our toes are sure to!"

All day the big brig continued to overhaul the sloop; and the white schooner, which had gone about, continued to run neck and neck with the quarry down the wind not more than half a mile away. The sun went down, the moon came up, and the *Tartar* continued to run desperately against hope.

Sky and sea were clear of any cloud or hint of mist. When the moon had run her course the stars were like lamps. The *Tartar* was cleared for action before dawn. All hands had an early breakfast, at which rum was served, and went to their stations.

The guns were loaded and shot were heated. The brave fellows joked as they awaited daylight and death, though all but the youngsters knew that the chances of a sloop fighting off a twenty-two gun brig were not two in a hundred.

Dawn broke, showing the brig astern of the sloop and within a quarter of a mile of her, and the white schooner about a quarter of a mile off the brig's port bow.

"What in the world is that fellow about?" asked Scovil. "He's lying close to the danger zone, and may get his fingers scorched. Let us pray that he will!"

Just then the Frenchman let fly with his bow guns. The sloop replied from her taffrail. The smoke of the guns clung white and low to the little waves and was gradually spread by the wind. The schooner sheered off.

Half an hour passed without another shot. Then the brig, now on the sloop's quarter, swung and delivered a broadside. The *Tartar* staggered, but replied. The schooner, half a mile away, let a puff of smoke out of her nose. Scovil saw it, but had no time to think about it. He swung, and hulled the brig with his heavy stern-pieces.

Ten minutes later he lost his topmast and a dozen men. Crippled, he knew that he was now at the brig's mercy. She would take her position and rake

the unfortunate sloop from stem to stern; but he fought on, at the same time clearing the wreckage of top-hamper from the deck.

In a lull in the firing of his own guns he was astonished to see the French brig's foretop sway and crash down. He did not stop to wonder at it, but crawled across the brig's bows and put four red-hot shot into her and a score of bullets into her open ports. Then, as he drew away, he gave her a rap with his heavy metal aft.

The brig's maintop went by the board. The sloop, sadly splintered, and with a third of her crew dead or wounded, drew away from her big antagonist as fast as her crippled condition would permit.

The white schooner, now about a quarter of a mile away from the brig, calmly continued her target-practice with her big bow-chaser and the brig as her target. She shifted her ground constantly. The brig returned her attentions somewhat wildly. The schooner seemed to possess a very fine gun and an exceptional gunner.

Commander Scovil thanked Heaven for the amazing thing that had happened and took full advan-

tage of it. He supposed that the schooner held some particular grudge against the French frigate and had chosen this as a fairly safe time to try to settle it. However that might be, he did not feel that his duty lay with either the pirate or the French war-ship, but with his own sloop and his own men. So he did what he could for his wounded men and his wounded top-hamper and then crawled slowly away from the field of action.

To his astonishment and chagrin the schooner left its game of demolishing the brig at long range and came swiftly after him. It overhauled the sloop at a clipping pace. Scovil sent his men back to their stations. The men of the white schooner swarmed into the rigging and lined the rail and cheered. Scovil, sorely puzzled, cautioned his men not to fire cannon or musket unless they first saw some threatening sign aboard the schooner.

The schooner passed so close to the sloop that a tall man on her poop was able to throw a bottle onto the sloop's deck.

Four days later the *Tartar* crawled into the harbor of Nevis under a makeshift topmast, with splint-

ered bulwarks and a patched hull. Her wounded were carried ashore. Her dead had already gone to their deep-sea grave.

Her anchors were scarcely down before Alexander Burnham came aboard, eager to hear what adventure had befallen his ship and his shipmates. He met the commander at the side, all ready to go ashore in the gig and report the engagement to the governor. The two shook hands warmly; then Scovil put a hand under Burnham's elbow and entered the cabin with him. He led the way to his own.

Scovil was Alexander's senior by a few years—a slender man with a long, thin face and pensive eyes. He was swarthy as a Spaniard, almost foppish in his dress, played on more than one musical instrument with sentiment as well as dexterity, and wrote verses. He was a good seaman and a courageous fighter, and had fairly won his promotion. He told his friend the story of the remarkable battle with the French brig, watching the other's face all the while with a curious, tender glance.

"So the pirate got you out of that scrape!" said

Alexander. "The notorious *Wasp* is an Englishman, then. I take off my hat to him."

"He saved the sloop and the life of every man of us who is alive to-day," replied Scovil gravely. "Yes, he is an Englishman—and I owe him a debt which I fear I shall never be able to repay."

"But why did he throw the bottle aboard the sloop?" asked Burnham.

"There was a letter in it."

"A letter? That should be interesting reading."

"I have not read it, my dear lad. I have not broken the seal—and it is fastened with a very good one. It is addressed to you, Alexander."

"To me?" cried Burnham, suddenly paling and shaking. "To me, sir? What can that mean? Let me have it!"

Scovil produced a small, crumpled packet from an inner pocket. He held it in his hand, and the other read the following inscription on the face of it:

"To Alexander Burnham, Esq., Royal Navy, Sloop-of-war *Tartar*."

Scovil turned the packet over, and Alexander beheld the Burnham arms stamped on the back of it in several places in red wax. Then the commander passed the letter over to his senior lieutenant, turned his back, and looked out of the little port at a patch of glistening sea.

Scovil heard the breaking of the dry wax, the rustling of paper. He heard a faint groan and again the rustling of the paper. Silence followed. He continued to stand and look out at the patch of glistening sea for fully ten minutes; then he spoke, without turning.

"Anything important, Alexander?" he asked, in a pinched voice.

He got no answer to the question; so he turned slowly and beheld Burnham leaning heavily against the closed door. The lieutenant's eyes stared straight ahead, wide and unseeing. His face was colorless as death; his lower jaw sagged, and his lips were twisted in an expression of utter misery. His right hand, hanging limp at his side, clutched the letter.

Scovil sprang forward with a cry of concern

and slipped an arm about his friend's shoulders.

"What is it?" he asked; and yet he knew, for he had guessed. "Burn it," he continued. "It shall go no farther, lad. Tell me nothing. Let me fetch a light from the galley, and some brandy. Come over here, lad, and lie in my berth until I get back —and put that in your pocket."

Alexander trembled, set his jaws, and stood straight. He looked at his friend fixedly for a second, then with a quick warmth in his eyes.

"God bless you, Peter," he said. "But no—no, I may not burn it yet. You must read it, and Elizabeth Nash must read it. Must I quit the service of my country? Must the world know of our disgrace? It is for you to read this thing and tell me, as my commanding officer and as my friend."

"I tell you now, lad, that there is no more cause for you to leave the service than for me to leave it," replied Scovil. "As for the world—why, the deuce take it! Let me burn the thing. You can tell me what you wish—or tell me nothing."

"Read it," said Alexander, pressing the letter into Scovil's hand.

This is what Scovil read:

"My dear Alexander:

"I am glad to have been of some service to you and their gracious majesties to-day. I regret that my affairs made it necessary for me to leave Nevis before your arrival. Be good enough to give my warmest and most respectful regards to Captain Nash and his charming daughter.

"Miss Elizabeth is beautiful and clever, but of too superior a type of woman to greatly appeal to me. My tastes are low, and that's the truth. When you next communicate with our honored father, kindly let him know that his devoted son James is established in an occupation much better suited to his inherited talents than the exportation of rum and sugar. He will doubtless be pleased to hear that I am following at sea, and with considerable success, the same gentlemanly calling which the founder of our family followed on land in the days of old.

"I have the honor to remain, my dear Alexander, your affectionate brother,

"James Burnham."

Scovil folded the letter and returned it to Alexander.

"I am glad he thought you were aboard," he said. "I owe my life and my ship to that mistake. He is a brave man, but bitter as gall. I prefer a pirate to a coward, lad. Now may I fetch a candle and burn it? Let it end here, Sandy, for Heaven's sake! Your hand, lad."

They shook hands and gazed hard at each other, eye to eye, and each knew that their friendship was stronger than ever.

"I must show it to Elizabeth," said Alexander. "She promised to marry me. I should indeed be a miserable coward—a more despicable character than this unfortunate brother of mine—if I were to hide it from her."

"You are right," replied the commander. "Let her read it, and then destroy it. I'll invent a story to explain the incident of the bottle to the governor and the sloop's company. Now I must go ashore and make my report. We'll go together."

Alexander inquired for Elizabeth and was directed to one of the gardens. She was frightened

by his white face and haggard eyes, and ran to him with her hands extended. He held them in his and told her, swiftly and briefly, the story of the sloop's adventure.

Then, freeing her right hand, he pressed the open letter into it. He saw the blood slip away from her cheeks as she read. She finished reading, crushed the letter in her hand, looked up into his face with eyes tender and loving and beautiful beyond words, and flung her arms around his neck. She drew his face slowly down to her own and kissed him on the brow, the eyes, and the lips.

The letter was not burned, but was torn into tiny fragments and buried deep in the warm garden-loam at the roots of a rose-bush.

As Elizabeth still loved him, and was now more anxious to marry him than ever, Alexander Burnham decided that his best plan was to retire from the navy. He possessed a snug property in Berkshire that had come to him from his maternal grandmother. He felt that he owed this step to Elizabeth; and, for his own part, his ardor for pirate-hunting had cooled. He did not relish the

prospect of capturing his brother and swinging him from a yard-arm by the neck.

Elizabeth urged him to carry out this plan without delay. She wanted to have her lover safe in England. Glory and the needs of her country seemed small things to her now.

Alexander talked to Scovil, and at last succeeded in bringing the commander around to his way of looking at the matter; so he wrote his resignation and gave it to Scovil to be forwarded, and continued on sick leave until he should receive an answer from the admiralty office.

Elizabeth hurried matters, for she was afraid that James Burnham might disclose himself again in his true colors, next time to some one less discreet than Commander Scovil, and that the governor might object to her marriage with the brother of a pirate. So she decided to take no chances and, without declaring her fears even to her lover, arranged to have the wedding take place at the earliest possible moment.

Within two months of the remarkable sea-fight in which a pirate had come to the help of a king's

ship, Elizabeth Nash and Alexander Burnham were married. The governor gave the bride away, Commander Scovil supported the bridegroom, the chaplain of the regiment performed the ceremony, and a score of men from the sloop, in command of one of the reefers, formed a guard of honor. The ceremony was followed by a garden-party.

The young couple took up their abode, for the time, with the bride's father. It was their intention to sail for England at the first opportunity, and Captain Nash would follow them to Berkshire.

A few days after the wedding the frigate *Thunderous* came into the little harbor from England, by way of the southern islands, with six companies of fresh troops for Nevis and orders to take the old garrison to Boston. Alexander and Elizabeth decided to sail with the frigate. In Boston they would be sure to find a safe ship to take them to England.

Mr. Stanton and Kitty Trimmer were married, very quietly, a day after the arrival of the *Thunderous*. Stanton intended to resign his commission in the army as soon as he reached Boston, and go to England and get his hands on the paternal fortune.

XV

JAMES BURNHAM prospered exceedingly. No undertaking of his miscarried. His men piled up plunder twice as fast as they had piled it up when they sailed with John Trimmer. From Slim Sam to the newest recruit they were ready to follow him anywhere.

The engagement with the French war-ship proved their faith in his prowess and luck. Slim Sam and his other officers advised him constantly to break with Trimmer; but this he refused to do so long as Trimmer kept faith with him.

Several weeks after the engagement with the Frenchman Burnham's schooner ran across Trimmer's schooner off the little island of Barbuda. It seems that John Trimmer's luck had deserted him of late; or perhaps it was that he missed the sage advice of Slim Sam. However that may be, he had suffered several reverses. He had twice been beaten off by heavily gunned merchantmen; and once he had taken a ship after hard fighting and found noth-

ing aboard her but fifty guineas and a cargo of sugar. As he was not in the sugar trade, the cargo was not worth a shilling to him, so his men began to grumble.

Both schooners ran into a quiet cove and their companies went ashore. James Burnham made his report to Captain Trimmer; and, upon hearing it, Trimmer's men all voiced their desire to ship with Captain Burnham.

Here was a blow to the ex-highwayman's vanity. Trimmer was furious. He accused James Burnham of treacherous intentions, and demanded his resignation of the command of *Le Diable*. James's retort laid Captain Trimmer on the flat of his back with a broken nose.

A half-hearted mix-up followed, in which half a dozen men were slightly wounded. Then James and his devoted admirers, and a dozen of Trimmer's hearties, went aboard *Le Diable* and sailed away. Thus Trimmer's great scheme fell to the sand.

Trimmer's ambition now was to break James Burnham. He told himself that he had nursed a viper in his bosom.

While the *Thunderous* lay off Bridgetown, Barbados, two weeks before her arrival in Nevis, Captain Robinson received a packet one morning from the hand of a ragged negro boatman. The boatman paddled quickly away from the ship's side immediately after delivering the packet.

Captain Robinson tore off the soiled sail-cloth wrapper and found a small, roughly drawn chart of three widely separated islands, and a page of written instructions concerning the habits and hiding-places of "that notorious pyrate in ye white schooner commonly known as the *Wasp*."

In the charts or instructions there was no mention of that particular retreat in which the beautiful Hélène lived, and in the harbor of which the original *Wasp* now lay at anchor, her slender hull newly painted as black as night.

Captain Robinson notified the governor of Barbados of this important communication from the unknown. Two ten-gun brigs which happened to be in the bay were sent to investigate the two nearer retreats, and the *Thunderous* sailed northward.

The *Thunderous* spent only four days in Nevis,

then continued her voyage. She headed due east, under easy sail, until sunset, then put about. As she approached the eastern coast of St. Kitts all her lights were extinguished or covered.

Lieutenant Alexander Burnham, who was now a passenger aboard the *Thunderous,* had been taken into Captain Robinson's confidence earlier in the day. There was no doubt in Alexander's mind as to the identity of the pirate whom Robinson hoped to take.

"I want to get their leader alive and hang him in Boston," said Robinson, rubbing his hands briskly together. "That'll do more good than stringing him up to my own yard-arm. Feather in my cap, too!"

Alexander was sick at heart. Horror and shame, and pity for Elizabeth and himself—yes, and for James, bit him to the very core of his being. The thought of a Burnham in irons aboard the *Thunderous,* with the crest of the Burnhams on his shoulder for all the world to wonder at and jeer at, went like ice and fire through his brain. How could Elizabeth ever forgive him this public disgrace? How should he himself ever recover from it? How

should Sir Walter ever again hold up his head in distant Berkshire?

Then, after black and weary weeks, would follow the public hanging in Boston; but before the hanging would come the trial. Ah, the trial! That would be the hardest and most shameful stage of the terrible proceedings. Already in his mind's eye he saw the gloating populace and the incredulous and austere judge, the curiosity of every one to obtain a closer view of the device on the back of the notorious pirate, the horror and rage on thousands of faces when the story of the prisoner's crimes was told.

And he—perhaps even Elizabeth—would be forced to bear witness that this monster was none other than James Burnham. Perhaps he would be called upon to disclose the device upon his own shoulder.

The *Thunderous* lay to off the black coast, and three cutters, full of armed men, pulled away from her with muffled oars. Alexander Burnham crouched in the bow of one of the cutters. He had left Elizabeth sleeping soundly in their comfortable

cabin aboard the frigate. He was dressed like a common seaman, and his face and hands were stained so as to look rough and weather-beaten. He felt that it was hopeless to think of warning James of the attack. He could think of no plan of action; but he was determined that James should not be taken aboard the frigate alive.

The cutters found the entrance to Bottle Harbor and crept silently into the basin. They saw the white schooner like a pale ghost against the blackness of the hills and the water. Beyond the vague shimmer which they knew to be the schooner's hull they could just detect pale patches which they took to be the white fronts of houses.

Captain Robinson had decided that most of the schooner's company would be sleeping ashore; so two of the boats went ashore and one slid noiselessly alongside the vessel. Alexander was in one of the boats that went ashore.

The little stone houses were surrounded. The doors and windows stood wide open. At the sound of a pistol-shot from the schooner the attack began. Alexander did not join in the assault, but slunk into

the jungle near the stranded boats and watched and waited.

The pirates were taken completely by surprise, both ashore and on the schooner. The few who composed the anchor-watch aboard the vessel were quickly overpowered. The ruffians in the houses made a desperate resistance, despite the odds against them. Some escaped to the jungle, some fell fighting, and the rest were disarmed and bound. Three of the frigate's men were killed and half a dozen were wounded.

Now lanterns were lighted and the prisoners examined. James Burnham, who was one of them, was pointed out as the captain by one of his comrades. Alexander, lurking behind a bush, witnessed the discovery, made by a young lieutenant of the *Thunderous,* of the device on the pirate's shoulder.

The young lieutenant showed considerable astonishment. Perhaps he had heard something of James Burnham and the design on his back during his brief stay in Nevis. Alexander heard him ask a question, and heard James admit his identity in reply.

The night was cloudy. The two lanterns ashore

threw short and feeble bands of yellow light. The prisoners and the wounded were being carried down, muskets and pistols were discharged occasionally in the jungle, and the men of the *Thunderous* jostled and crowded on the sand near the beached cutters. One of the lanterns was overturned, broken, and the candle extinguished by a careless or designing foot. Some one shouted that the pirate captain had escaped into the jungle.

Confusion reigned for a little while, and the men who had captured the schooner came ashore with torches and lanterns. The cords with which the pirate commander's wrists and ankles had been bound were found lying on the sand, cleanly cut through. Evidently one of the escaped pirates had crept out of the edge of the jungle, trampled upon the lantern, and cut his captain free. This was the opinion of the officers in command of the war-ship's boats.

A brief and fruitless expedition was made into the jungle. Half an hour later the three boats retired with the captured schooner towing behind them. They reached the frigate before dawn.

Alexander found his wife still sleeping peacefully. He locked the door of the cabin noiselessly, and in the dark divested himself of his scanty and soiled attire. He made the shirt and breeches into a small bundle, weighted the bundle with a pistol and a heavy knife, and dropped it through the port into the sea.

Then he washed his face and hands, donned his night-robe, and retired thankfully to his narrow berth. The shameful tragedy had been averted. He had averted it with his own hand. He thanked God, and presently fell into a peaceful slumber.

When Alexander and Elizabeth awoke and went on deck they beheld the green island of St. Kitts far astern. The white schooner, manned by a prize crew, sailed on the frigate's course half a mile to starboard. Alexander intended to confess all to his wife some day; but just now he told her nothing of the cutting-out expedition of the night.

Suddenly he remembered a thing which he had overlooked in the first joyous flood of relief—to wit, that the pirate captain's identity had become known to the invaders before his escape. He was chilled

and shaken for a moment; but he recovered himself quickly. This was bad; but the thing which he had averted, by the mercy of God, was a thousand times worse.

He had done his best for his family, for himself, and for James. He could do no more now than face the humiliating scandal like a man.

Shortly after breakfast Alexander was summoned politely to Captain Robinson's cabin. He found half a dozen other officers with the captain. All looked embarrassed. All shook hands with him, the captain leading.

"We did not get the leader of the pirates aboard —and I'm glad of it, now that I've thought it over," said Robinson. "We got his schooner and smashed his crew. We drew his sting; and, considering the circumstances, I'm glad we did no more—for your sake."

The color died slowly out of Alexander's face and his glance fell.

"For my sake?" he queried. "What d'ye mean?"

The old sailor explained his meaning, awkwardly, kindly, ramblingly. The notorious pirate who had

made a bloody reputation for himself up and down the islands as the *Wasp* was a Burnham. He had that on his back which proved it; and he had admitted that he was none other than James Burnham, the same who had lived for some time on Nevis. Of course, the men knew about it and would talk; but Captain Robinson and the officers would keep their mouths shut on the subject, and no official announcements of the *Wasp's* identity would be made.

Captain Robinson and the six officers present were all very sorry for Alexander, spoke of the respect in which the Burnham family was held, and hoped that Alexander would not allow the behavior of his brother to prey upon his mind.

Alexander listened with an ashen face and veiled eyes. He thanked the captain and the other gentlemen in a dull voice. He glanced around at the pitying faces. Pity! Pity was ever a dose to offend a Burnham gullet. What had he, Alexander, ever done to provoke pity? And perhaps some of this pity was not entirely unmixed with scorn. And it might be that some of these polite and mournful

gentlemen even pitied Elizabeth for having married a Burnham.

James was a black disgrace to his family. James deserved hanging by the neck. But, by Heaven, there was something to be said in James's favor!

"I suspected something of the kind," said Alexander. "I knew that James had gone wrong. In fact, I knew that he had—had taken to this hellish trade. You have all—heard about the *Tartar's* fight with the French twenty-two, and of the white schooner that came into the affair and saved the sloop? That was this same brother of mine. He threw a letter aboard in a bottle, with his name to it; but Scovil kept it quiet, for my sake. I showed the letter to my wife—she was not my wife then—and she destroyed it. He came to the help of the *Tartar*—and, though he deserves hanging a dozen times over, he has that affair to his credit. That is all, gentlemen. You will forgive me, I know, for attempting to show that this infamous brother of mine is a shade less infamous than other murderers and robbers. I thank you again for your consideration."

From the climbing jungles around Bottle Harbor the scattered survivors of James Burnham's crew gathered upon the sand.

"They got the cap'n," said one. "I seen 'em throw him an' tie him. If it wasn't for that, we'd be afloat agin inside the month in a new ship."

"Aye," said another, with a blistering oath. "An' inside six weeks we'd be cuttin' the heart out o' the carcass o' that treacherous John Trimmer—for it was him set the king's ship onto us. Aye, if they hadn't took Burnham, we'd git John Trimmer yet. Or even if Slim Sam hadn't got his gizzard slit; but no, Slim wasn't no fighter, though he was a fine scholard."

At that moment James Burnham emerged from the jungle, where he had been lying on his back for hours, planning for the future and communing with his blackened soul. He joined the disconsolate group of twelve.

"Here I am, lads," he said. "We'll settle our score with John!"

XVI

THE men on the beach gaped at James Burnham as if he were a visitor from beyond the grave.

Young Henry Todd was the first to recover his wits. He sprang to James and embraced him. At that the others got to their feet and crowded around their hero. James received their rude and blasphemous expressions of congratulation and pleasure, and their questions concerning his escape, with an ironical, slanted smile. His hard eyes were softened a little by an expression as of weariness.

"It was my brother who cut me free, lads," he said; "Lieutenant Burnham, no less. He trod on the lantern and then cut my bonds; but I saw his face before he smashed the light. That's what family pride will do, lads. It'll drive a king's officer to setting free a bloody pirate."

"An' maybe it wasn't all for pride's sake he done it," said one of the ruffians, a huge fellow with a fresh wound on his low forehead and a little gold

cross suspended from his thick, blood-stained neck and gleaming on his hairy chest. "Ye done him a good turn, cap'n, when ye saved him an' his sloop from the French brig. Yerself an' him be brothers; an' blood bes thicker nor water!"

James laughed dryly.

"Rip me if I don't believe ye're a sentimentalist, Tom Croft," he said. "But, however that may be, you should know all about the thickness of blood."

"Where've ye been ever since, sir?" asked Todd.

"I've been lying in the bush," replied James, "meditating on my sins and on the instability of human life and fortune, and trying to plan some way of coming speedily to a meeting with John Trimmer."

Such of the pirates' plunder as had been hidden near Bottle Harbor was found undisturbed in its hole in the ground. This deposit was a veritable treasure—gold and jewelry and silver to the value of a dozen comfortable fortunes. It was tied up in small sacks of stout sail-cloth, and these bags were stowed away in strong oaken chests.

"We'll shift this," said James. "Trimmer may

give us the slip and call in here while we are away looking for him."

So a new hiding-place was found, and the treasure transferred to it. And now it was time to take the first step toward finding Trimmer and settling their account with him.

Their resources, excepting the buried treasure, consisted of two bags of sea-biscuits which had survived the general destruction by fire and sword, a small boat which had escaped the notice of the cutters-out, a dry cave well stored with arms and ammunition, and an unlimited supply of fresh fruit and fresh water.

The numerical strength of the company was thirteen, including the commander. Twelve of these gentry were in the pink of physical condition, barring a few minor wounds; but one of them, Bill Hook by name, was suffering from an intermittent fever. A man of something about forty years was this Hook, red of head and whiskers, and reduced almost to bone and skin by the gnawings of his disease.

"Thirteen," said Tom Croft, with an eye on poor

Bill Hook. "There bain't no luck in thirteen save devilish bad luck. It be flyin' into the face of things to go after Trimmer with a company o' thirteen!"

Bill Hook trembled and swore and plucked at his red beard with a clawlike hand. The others turned curious, leering faces toward him.

"I don't hold with these old wives' tales," said James Burnham. "I leave such for blundering swabs like John Trimmer. John was afraid of the number thirteen as he's afraid of me. John would never get his anchor up on a Friday, nor have a black cat aboard, nor look at a new moon without turning his money over in his breeches-pocket. And what has luck done for the dog? He enjoyed some fool luck until a better man came along—and there it ended. Who is the captain you lads chose to follow, of your own free will—John Trimmer or Jim Burnham? Aye, Jim Burnham. You're ready to follow Trimmer now—to slit his dirty throat when you overhaul him. What's all this infernal superstition done for that white-livered hound?"

"He's got his ship, cap'n, an' he's got his full crew; an' ye ain't got neither," replied Tom Croft.

"Aye," returned James with a dangerous, slow smile which caused the thick skin on the back of Croft's neck to twitch and creep. "Aye, Tom, he's got his schooner, and he's got his full crew; and here am I with twelve men left of my crew and a fourteen-foot boat. But can you name me ten lads o' his crew who wouldn't leave him and come to me at a whistle? Not you, Tom Croft. And how will his new moons and his old wives' tales serve him when we slip into his harbor some dark night and you go over the rail o' the schooner and into the forecastle and tell the lads that Captain Burnham is waiting alongside to take command and cut out Trimmer's stinking heart? How'll the luck fall then?"

"Aye, sir, ye'll have the wind o' him if ye ever come up with him; but we won't never go over the rail o' the white schooner if we sail a company o' thirteen. Thirteen has done for many a stout mate o' mine, cap'n."

"And if you let me hear any more o' your silly babbling it will bring yourself to a violent and sudden death," retorted James with a snarl in his voice.

Though Tom Croft was cowed into silence, he was not satisfied; and several other members of the little company mistrusted the number thirteen as keenly as he did. They whispered together whenever the captain's eye was not upon them. James knew, of course, that they meant to reduce the unlucky number of the company by one; and he knew, as well as Bill Hook knew, that the reduction would be made at poor Bill's expense. This knowledge amused James; but it did not amuse Bill Hook to any extent.

Though slightly amused by the ignorance of his followers, the captain said nothing more to the discredit of ancient superstitions. He set them briskly at work. Two oaken breakers were filled and stowed in the boat. Fruit, the two bags of biscuits, arms, and ammunition were put aboard. Then James Burnham explained his plan of campaign.

They would follow the coast northward for a distance of twelve or fifteen miles, and then, under cover of darkness, slip into the cove of a little French fishing village that he had sighted more than once from his schooner's deck. There they

would supply themselves with the largest and best of the fishing-boats and such provisions as the place could offer. This done, they would turn about and sail to Nevis, where, in a little port which he had often noticed when he lived on that island, they would be sure to find an inter island trading-schooner that would serve their purpose. Perhaps they would pick up half a dozen recruits, if it could be done quietly; but he was anxious not to attract attention and so let the word get about that he was still at large.

This done, they would make a comfortable voyage to that hidden harbor where, as it was only reasonable to suppose, John Trimmer the traitor still lay in retirement with his fine white schooner and the beautiful Hélène.

The plan was well received. As the day was now near its end, it was decided that the little expedition should leave Bottle Harbor at the first lift of dawn. They did not build a fire that night, for fear that the ship that had sent in the boats had left watchers somewhere near at hand.

They retired to the hills above the harbor to

sleep. The fact that Bill Hook did not lie down with them escaped their notice in the dark.

Bill was not more than fifty yards away from the resting-place of the twelve. He lay down on the warm loam and shook with the ague-chills of his fever. The sickness passed in time, leaving him deathly weak and fatigued for an hour. He got to his feet at last and leaned against a tree. He drew his knife from its sheath and felt edge and point with a calloused thumb. He reasoned with himself dully, slowly, clawing his red beard all the while with fingers like yellow bones.

Thirteen was an unlucky number. The number of their company would be reduced to twelve before dawn, for Tom Croft intended to knife him in the dark. Yes, he quite agreed with Croft that thirteen was a bad number for any party setting out on an adventurous undertaking. But he considered it unfair of his mates to take it for granted that the reduction should be made by eliminating him, because he happened to be suffering from a touch of fever.

He, Bill Hook, was still a good man, he'd have

them know, even if he wasn't hog-fat and ruddy as a dairymaid. He'd live to see them all cut down or aswing! He was as good a sailorman as Tom Croft, he was, and just as bloody a pirate, though maybe not so dirty and brutish in his habits. He'd just put Tom Croft away, that he would, instead of letting Tom put him away.

No self-respecting gentleman of fortune could do less. He didn't hold with knifing messmates as a general rule, but he considered this to be a very exceptional case.

The twelve slumbered deeply in the dark of that high jungle. Poor Bill Hook crawled around them and among them, unseen and unheard. He paused frequently to listen to the breathing of his mates, sometimes to pass inquiring, feather-light finger-tips over an unconscious breast.

At last his fingers encountered the little gold cross which adorned the hairy bosom of Tom Croft. In his right hand he held his heavy knife, which was keen of edge. Bill Hook was a practical anatomist. The red spirit of Croft the sentimentalist fled his stalwart carcass without so much as a grunt.

Owing to his weakened condition, Bill experienced no little difficulty in getting the dead body away without awakening the eleven sleepers. He managed it at last, however, in the sweat of his yellow brow. He was fortunate enough to find a deep hole in the floor of the forest within a few hundred yards of the scene of the operation, and into this he stowed the corpse of the defender of superstitions.

The fateful number had claimed its victim; and the red-headed instrument of fate cleaned his knife and his hands, returned to his sleeping comrades, and lay down peacefully beside the captain.

All were astir at daybreak—all except Tom Croft. Several of them were tactless enough to look at poor Bill Hook, who was just having his morning chills, as if they had not expected to see him. They hallooed for Tom, but only the echoes answered them. They looked again at Bill; and Bill smiled painfully back at them despite the chattering of his teeth.

"Dead of his own physic!" exclaimed one. "Bill got 'im."

James Burnham laughed.

"If Tom is dead," he said, "then he's got his own

silly superstition to thank for it. Now we are twelve; and there's the end o' it."

"Tom was in the right o' it, anyhow," said one of the men. "He said as how thirteen was unlucky, an' now he's proved it. Where'd ye plant 'im, Bill? Tom Croft an' me was good friends, we was, an' he owed me a mite o' money, he did—just about what that there little cross would square. Pipe up, matey, so's I can go an' take a last sight o' Tom's pore remains. Where'd ye put him to?"

"Stow that!" said James sharply. "We've no time for collecting debts from the dead. It's the livin' we're concerned with."

The little boat crawled northward along the coast for several hours. When the sun was high the voyagers went ashore and hid the craft. Six of the company set out on foot to spy upon the village.

The boat was launched and manned again immediately after sunset. The quiet cove where the fishing-boats rode at their stone anchors was entered two hours later. The village slumbered peacefully. No dog barked even when the adventurers went ashore in search of provisions.

James Burnham's luck was with him. Some rough provisions were found in an unguarded storehouse and carried down to the boat. Then the best craft of the little fleet was provisioned and manned. The anchor was brought noiselessly aboard. Oars were muffled and manned, and the pride of the fleet stole out of the cove like a dark ghost, with the open boat towing astern.

Clear of the cove, the patched sail was hoisted. The voyagers beat up to windward for a couple of hours, then headed due south. A chill caught Bill Hook and rattled his teeth.

The affair of the trading-schooner proved to be a trifle more difficult than the affair of the fishing-boat, but the daring voyagers transferred themselves from the fishing-boat to the decked fore-and-after within sixty hours of the theft of the former craft.

The little trader's anchor-watch, numbering three, had put up a slight resistance and had suffered extermination. One of Burnham's company had been killed; but, as it happened to be poor Bill Hook, it did not matter much.

And now they squared away on what they hoped

would be the last stage of their progressive voyage.

They sailed southward for a day and a night and a day, and on a morning of pearl and gold and pink, off the Saints' Passage, they sighted a small brig to leeward of them, and also heading south. James studied the brig through his glass for a moment, then called Henry Todd to him and handed him the glass.

"Tell me if you ever saw that craft before," he said.

The lad looked, then gave vent to a rattling volley of oaths.

"The *Vartue!*" he exclaimed. "The Boston brig *Vartue!*"

James nodded, and called his reduced company to him. He told them what he knew of the brig *Virtue,* and he propounded an elaboration of his original plan. It might well be, so he said, that a night attack on John Trimmer's stronghold would fail. Perhaps John had wormed and blustered his way back into the confidence of the majority of his crew by this time.

Even if this were not the case, the mischief might

be done before he, James, had proved his identity. One minute of ignorance on the part of Trimmer's hundred might mean the extermination of Burnham's eleven. He was willing to risk it, of course; but, first of all, he would like to lay a new plan before his comrades.

There sailed the brig *Virtue;* and, unless she had changed her skipper and her mate since he and Henry Todd had been aboard her, there sailed a brig ripe and ready for their purpose. He was ready to stake his reputation on the assertion that, with Smith and Winch still bullying, starving, and overworking the crew, eighty per cent. of the men would be glad to become gentlemen of fortune. In that case it would be a small matter to get possession of the brig and a likely lot of recruits.

Then they would sail the tublike brig down to within sight of John Trimmer's lookouts, the very picture of a helpless merchantman. Out John would come, unable to resist so easy a prize, and lay the white schooner alongside without loss of time or ammunition. He knew John's way of dealing with an easy proposition.

Then, even while the boarders were coming up the brig's side, he would declare himself and proclaim Trimmer's treachery. Should this fail to excite a demonstration on his behalf aboard the white schooner, and he vowed that it would not fail utterly, then the hidden bombs and grenades would be thrown over the brig's rail upon the schooner's deck, and in the ensuing confusion and consternation he would follow the explosives with the heroic ten and the New England recruits at his back.

Perhaps James Burnham's reasoning powers carried his argument; but it is more likely that his reputation for courage and success, assisted by a craving for bloodshed in every one of those dread hearts, brought his ten followers to his view.

The brig *Virtue* was a slow sailor, blunt of build and foul of bottom. Captain Smith examined the shabby little fore-and-after through his glass and felt no premonition of disaster. An ordinary French inter island trading-schooner was all he saw, with three ragged fellows on her narrow deck, a chicken-coop lashed at the foot of the mainmast, half a dozen rum casks lashed in her scuppers, and a peace-

ful, wind-snatched wisp of smoke trailing away from the pipe of her little galley.

"There comes what we be a lookin' for," he said to Mr. Winch. "Rum an' fowls at a bargain, an' maybe some tobacco. She'll be up with us afore noon."

"An' maybe a keg of French brandy," said Winch, chuckling. "D'ye call to mind the brandy we got from the little French trader last v'yage, not fifty miles from this same spot? A keg of it, a dozen fowls, a suckin' pig, an' a thousand seegars from the Brazils."

"Aye," replied Smith, with a reminiscent eye on the humble craft astern. "Aye, Mr. Mate; but I don't rightly recollect what them same welcome provisions cost us."

"Them cost us a polite good-day-to-ye," returned Mr. Winch; and at this sally of wit the two mariners laughed heartily.

The shabby but speedy fore-and-after was within hailing distance of the brig by noon. A scantily clad fellow hailed the *Virtue* from the smaller craft's bowsprit, inquiring in broken English if the

master of the brig would let him have some good salt fish in exchange for rum, molasses, tobacco, or brandy. Captain Smith winked at his mate and replied to the Frenchman that he had some very superior salt fish in his hold and would be glad to do business.

The brig was laid to. The little fore-and-after came alongside very cleverly, letting her mainsail and foresail belly down to the deck at the very moment that Mr. Winch heaved her a line. There was no sea running.

The two vessels lay side to side. The fellow who had hailed the brig mounted the schooner's rail and scrambled up the brig's side. He wore nothing but a soiled shirt, soiled canvas breeches, and a wide sash of red silk. His legs and feet were bare and weather-stained. He announced himself as Pierre Hatte, master of *La Belle Marie*. His hair was black and his eyes dark and quick. His real name was David Jones.

The bargaining proceeded slowly, for M. Hatte possessed very little English and Captain Smith no French at all.

XVII

SMITH refused to show his fish until the rum and brandy were brought aboard the brig, so a large keg of rum and a small keg of brandy were hoisted out of the fore-and-after and up the brig's side.

This M. Hatte was evidently a simpleton. When Smith invited him into the cabin he went. Mr. Winch entered the cabin also. The captain served rum and water in earthenware mugs, and all three sat down at the table. The visitor produced two heavy knives from the folds of his sash, one in each hand.

"Ye took me for a French trader, did ye?" he said. "Up with yer flippers! I be a bloody pirate, and one o' the *Wasp's* company. Sit where ye be, mates!"

Captain Smith and Mr. Winch held their hands above their heads and stared at their guest with hor-

rified eyes. Their lips were twisted in sickly, mirthless grins. David Jones was now on his feet.

"I'd kill ye meself, but for fear o' offending Cap'n Burnham," he said pleasantly. "I got an idee as how the cap'n wants to slit yer gullets with his own hand. Hark to that! Sit still, curse ye!"

Smith was already on his feet, with his right hand encircling one of the heavy stoneware mugs; but before he could lift the mug to throw it, David Jones threw both his knives. Smith screamed and crashed down across the table with one knife embedded in his throat and one in his abdomen.

Winch snatched up a three-legged stool and hurled it at Jones, vaulted the table and the still quivering clay of the ship-master, and dashed from the cabin and up the short ladder to the deck. But there his flight ended—with James Burnham's sword through him, and the silver hilt of it within four inches of his breastbone.

The half-hearted resistance of the brig's crew had been practically overcome before Winch's sudden and terrific extinction. Only the huge negro cook continued to fight. He had seen and recognized

Henry Todd, and so had shrewdly guessed that surrender would benefit him not at all. He had heard Burnham's shouted offer of life and fortune for every man who surrendered without striking a blow, but he remembered his treatment of the boy Todd, and knew that the generous offer, even if genuine, would not apply to him.

He was a bully of two hundred and twenty pounds in weight of muscle and bone, and a favorite pastime of his had been to clout sailormen over the head with a skillet when they came to the door of the galley for food. This joke had always amused Smith and Winch. So the cook retired to his galley and proceeded to defend it against all comers.

The galley had one window, and the first man to attempt to fire a pistol through this window received a gallon of boiling water in his face. The door was shattered, but so appalling was the outburst of hot water, scalding food, and iron that the besiegers drew away from the breach.

The galley filled with smoke. Henry Todd mounted the roof and speedily hacked a hole through the thin timber. Smoke poured up through

the rent. Six pistols were passed up to Todd, who methodically discharged all of them through the hole in the roof.

"He'll 'ave the brig afire!" cried some one. "He's upsot the stove!"

James ordered water to be passed up over the side and thrown upon the galley. Half a dozen of the brig's old crew hastened to obey the order. Suddenly the splinters of the door were driven outward and the iron fire-box of the stove, with fire in its belly, was hurled through the smoking maw. It struck a member of the bucket-brigade full in the chest and hurled him to the deck crushed and burned.

After the stove came the huge negro himself, with a bar of iron in his right hand, his left arm hanging limp, and blood streaming down his face. He brained the wounded and prostrate New Englander, then dashed at James Burnham. Half a dozen knives were thrown, and though two of them found their mark, the maddened negro neither halted nor swerved. Burnham had his straight sword in his hand. He sprang lightly aside, turned quicker than

HALF A DOZEN KNIVES WERE THROWN BUT THE MADDENED NEGRO NEITHER HALTED NOR SWERVED p. 296

it can be told, and lunged with all his weight behind the silver hilt.

That was the end of the *Virtue's* gigantic cook.

The fire in the shattered deck-house was extinguished. The brig had been taken with comparatively little bloodshed, thanks to the mutinous condition of her crew. In all, only seven of her original company had been killed, including Smith, Winch, the cook, and the fellow whom the cook had crushed with the stove.

One of Burnham's fellows was dying from a scalded face and throat, and two were slightly wounded. So the brig's company now numbered twenty—ten old pirates and ten new.

James addressed all hands. He had a trick of argument that never failed to convince ignorant and unscrupulous mariners that the life of a gentleman of fortune was the only one worth living, and that the sure way of succeeding as a gentleman of fortune was to follow James Burnham.

He spoke briefly, touched lightly on a few of his most amazing deeds, and referred his new comrades to David Jones, Henry Todd, and others for further

particulars. Then he spoke of the work and rewards of the immediate future. He explained that, to overthrow the traitor John Trimmer, they might have to increase their company by a score or so from Trimmer's crew. But what mattered a score, more or less, when treasure enough to make five hundred men wealthy for life lay waiting to be distributed?

He was cheered as heartily by the recruits as by the old hands. The honest fellows among the recruits—and there were several such—were delighted to know that they would not be called upon to fight against their own kind, but against a treacherous pirate.

It was five days after the capture of the brig *Virtue* by the indefatigable James Burnham that a lookout on the hills behind John Trimmer's harbor descended with word that a brig was crawling southward along the coast. This was welcome news to Trimmer, for he had been having trouble of late with certain of his followers, and looked to this brig to afford him the means of silencing the

grumblers. He felt that an easy prize and a bout at bloodshed would clear the air.

This port, which had resembled a corner of heaven when Trimmer first found it, now might well have been mistaken for a fragment of a very different region. A clutter of huts had sprung up around the sheltered basin. No word of the new settlement had reached the ears of honest folk, officials, or traders; but the underworld of those seas had got wind of it, and the dregs of humanity had crawled slowly into it—women from cities along the Spanish Main, fugitives from justice, deserters from English, French, and Spanish ships and garrisons, broken planters, broken traders, gamblers, murderers, and runaway slaves.

At first Captain Trimmer and his ruffians had found these immigrants both pleasing and useful to them. Trimmer was the king of the place, Hélène was its queen, the members of the schooner's company and their lights-o'-love formed the aristocracy. Some of the immigrants became agents and spies for Trimmer and his men; others opened gambling-houses. Still others became the hewers

of wood and drawers of water for the plantation.

Since his treacherous act against Burnham and the other schooner Trimmer had not ventured far from his hiding place or visited any of his other secret ports. His followers had been content, for a while, to remain inactive and wallow in the mire; but in the course of time many of them lost all their ready cash to the parasite gamblers.

At first it was a simple enough matter to set such an awkwardness straight by killing the gambler and starting all over again, but in time it was often the gambler who first used the knife or pistol. And some of the bold blades died at the hands of their shipmates in senseless brawls, and others died of fever, and still others of too much rum.

As the pirates weakened in numbers the parasites strengthened. Then the grumbling at John Trimmer commenced. Why didn't they put to sea? Why didn't they replenish their pockets from new prizes, or from one of their other treasure ports? And what had happened to James Burnham and the other schooner?

Trimmer's attempts at answering these questions

were not convincing. There was talk of Trimmer's jealousy of Burnham, and the spy who had served him in the matter of the frigate *Thunderous* dropped a few words of the truth. Trimmer went ashore and knifed the spy—but the mischief had been done. He was told to his face that by his treachery against Burnham and *Le Diable* he had everlastingly damned his luck.

He was afraid, despite his blustering oaths and blasphemous threats. He went aboard the schooner and lurked in his cabin like a hunted bear in its den. A sickness was upon him which made his nights hideous with dreams and open-eyed visions, and strangled his days with vague dread. He thought it was a slow fever, bred of the mists of the marsh to the right of the harbor; but in reality it was a sickness of the soul, bred of the poison of his innumerable bloody sins against God and man.

Fear was a strange messmate for John Trimmer, but now it was at his elbow night and day, urging him out to sea with one hand and holding him to his anchors with the other. He saw his authority shaking for a fall, he saw his very life threatened,

but a numbness of heart and mind made him incapable of clear thought or decisive action.

At news of the trader in the offing Trimmer took heart. He flew signals summoning his crew to assemble and come aboard. Many were too ill, or too far gone in rum, or too mutinous, to answer the signals save by oaths or shouts of derisive laughter from the shore. A few were dead who had been alive yesterday.

Forty came aboard at last. The anchors were walked up, the sails hoisted, and the schooner towed out of her berth. Outside the reef the wind filled her great sails. A mile to seaward crawled the brig, a perfect picture of dull and helpless commerce.

Trimmer thrust his belt full of pistols and knives, flashed a cutlas, and strutted in his old manner. A few of his fellows cheered. Some one went aloft with a glass to spy upon the brig's deck, and announced that the trader showed no guns and only ten men. The whole forty cheered at that.

The unfortunate brig cracked on sail, and her flutter of fear excited yells of derisive laughter

from the schooner. Every man of the forty was armed to the teeth, though several of them could not stand up under the weight of their weapons. Not more than a dozen of them were in first-class fighting trim. The faces of some were as yellow as lemons, of others as purple as grapes. Fever had their bones and rum had their nerves—and the evil one had laid hold of their bodies while waiting for their souls. Here was a text for a sermon, if you like.

The schooner overhauled the brig in short order and ran her aboard. The grappling-irons were thrown. The brig's rail stood four feet higher than the schooner's. With a wild shout the boarders massed and scrambled in the lee scuppers, with Trimmer in the front rank.

The sides of the vessels ground together. Trimmer sprang to the schooner's rail, with his cutlas in his teeth, and up and over the side of the helpless trader. For a fraction of a second he saw a score of armed men crouched under the brig's bulwarks, caught the scent of burning powder and the splutter of fuses—and then his soul was torn free

of his horror-stricken body in brief, terrible agony.

Down upon the heads and shoulders of the crowding boarders fell a shower of clumsy bombs—bottles, canisters, and earthen jugs charged with powder and slugs. The short fuses fell from some before the charges caught, and other fuses were tramped out blindly upon the deck; but five of the things exploded among the striving feet, killing and maiming a dozen of Trimmer's men. Then pistols were discharged and knives thrown by the brig's defenders, and the schooner's crew turned and struggled among themselves to win to the shelter of the cabin and forecastle.

James Burnham sprang down upon the schooner's deck, followed close by his twenty. Some of Trimmer's men turned and fought, but most of them fell with gaping wounds in their backs. Some recognized Burnham, and screamed to him for mercy in the name of old friendship; but his blood was up, and he stood in no need of old friends. It was a slaughter rather than a battle, and only Welsh Owen and five others were spared of Trimmer's ill-conditioned forty.

Welsh Owen explained Burnham's easy victory by telling of the hideous state of affairs in the harbor. James heard him with interest, then told his own story briefly. The dead were thrown overboard, and the schooner's decks were washed. Provisions were transferred from the brig to the schooner, after which the *Virtue* was scuttled.

There was treasure aboard the schooner, but there was more treasure hidden in the jungles behind the harbor. The schooner's company numbered twenty. The population of the harbor, such as it was, must have numbered close upon one hundred.

Burnham called a meeting of his followers and explained the condition of things ashore. He told them that the schooner was fit for sea, with stores and fresh water enough for the needs of her small company and gold and silver in the lazarettos. He was ready to sail to three other places where treasure was stored. They would all be rich as lords.

Was it worth the risk of their ship and their lives, he asked them, to reënter Trimmer's harbor and fight with the hundred ashore for a few thou-

sand pounds' worth of coin and jewels? He did not think so—and the twenty were with him in that. So the *Wasp,* now as black as she had been white in the days of her glory, stood boldly out to sea.

I know nothing of the fate of Trimmer's harbor or of Hélène da Silva; but one can imagine fever, murder, rum, and desertion soon depopulating the village, and the oft-widowed Hélène eloping in an open boat with all the available provisions of the place and the hardiest of the parasites. One can imagine the vigorous, lush jungle reclaiming the little clearings, burying the huts and booths, and again overhanging the very lips of the water.

Some treasure might still be found there in some unlooted hole in the ground under the jungle's heavy shade, and knives bitten deep with rust, and a tarnished buckle of silver from one of Hélène's little slippers—and bones gone to gray powder.

XVIII

FOUR months after the death of John Trimmer a gentleman who gave his name as James Fitzwalter engaged a passage from Kingston, Jamaica, to London, aboard the good ship *Golden Crown*. He wore a black patch over one eye, a scratch-wig, a decent blue coat, and white breeches something the worse for wear. The humpy roundness of his shoulders almost amounted to a deformity. His baggage consisted of a box of clothing, a smaller box full of books, and a weighty leather bag.

The captain of the *Golden Crown* considered Mr. Fitzwalter a very pleasant passenger, though of a remarkably quiet and retiring nature. He was a great student, it seemed, and would walk the deck for hours at a time with his nose in a book, heavy-shouldered and sedate.

He was a good listener, but never joined in the conversation of the ship's officers and his fellow passengers. His manner was detached, brooding,

even sad; and this, in connection with an elaborate mourning ring which he wore on the second finger of his right hand, led his companions to believe him to be a widower.

His age was the subject of much discussion. Some maintained that he had not yet seen his thirty-second year, and others that he would never again see his fiftieth.

The voyage was an uneventful one, and at the end of it Mr. Fitzwalter entered the mazes of London like a man who knew his way, with his leather bag in his hand and two watermen following with his chests. He soon found lodgings that suited him, and dismissed the watermen with a shilling apiece.

He remained in his apartments all day, having his meals served to him in his sitting-room. After his supper dishes had been carried away by the little maid he locked his outer door and retired to his bedroom. There he undressed. Had a spy been hidden in the room he would have been astonished to see that the slight hump of Mr. Fitzwalter's shoulders was a contrivance of leather attached to

his person by straps; and when the artificial hump was removed the heraldic device of the Burnhams of Burnham came to light.

James Burnham, once more in his native land, clothed himself in silk and linen from the larger of his two boxes, and removed the black patch from his left eye. His garments were rich in material, but not of the latest cut. He transferred some gold from the leather bag to his pockets, hid the bag, the artificial hump, and the black patch between the mattresses of his bed, then went out, locking the doors behind him.

He went in his own hair, leaving his scratch-wig in his bedroom. At his side he wore a long, silver-hilted sword. He went straight to a tailor's shop, and, after a deal of thumping on a side door, brought the master of the establishment to an upper window.

At last the tailor consented to admit the belated customer; and Mr. Fitzwalter—or James Burnham, if you like—was measured for a complete outfit of clothing that would have done credit to the greatest dandy at the court of the new queen.

James threw several gold pieces on the counter and told the man to ply his needle diligently. Next he visited a wig-maker and furnished himself with the latest thing in wigs to be had in town.

Next day James kept to his lodgings, heavy-shouldered, decently but somewhat poorly clothed, and with a patch over one eye. He smoked his long pipe and read in one of his brown books; and the little maid who waited upon him thought him a very kind and studious old gentleman.

After supper he changed again and went out into the ill-lit streets, leaving his deformity behind him. He visited half a dozen taverns and coffee-houses of the better sort. He drank sparingly, and at last returned to his lodgings without having seen or heard anything of the man he sought.

On the following night he visited another half-dozen taverns; and in the last one he overheard some talk of Percy Stanton.

"What has become of Percy Stanton?" asked one young blood of another. "I haven't clapped eyes on him since the Lord knows when. I don't miss his society, mind you, but I do miss his money!"

"So does he," replied the other young blood, and laughed immoderately. "You don't know Percy and his affairs as I do, Jack," he continued. "A bully, a sot, and a coward, with a dead corset-maker for a grandfather. There you have him, Jack. He was in the army and served in the Indies. When he came home he had a wife with him—a little beauty, too—but who was she but the daughter of a tailor from some village in Berkshire! There was the deuce to pay, for his people had set their hearts on his making a fine match. His father and mother and sisters had even gone so far as to find a daughter of a ruined baron, who was willing to marry our bold Percy for the spending of the corset-maker's fortune. They gave Percy a thousand guineas in hand, settled an annuity of twenty-five guineas on him; kicked him out of Corset Castle, and told him to go to the deuce. You saw his start, Jack. He's finishing in the lowest pot-houses; and I hear that he vents his spleen on his wife. He beats her, they say, and starves her."

"Why does she stay with him, if she's such a beauty?"

"Because she's married to him. The novelty of being a real wife, according to the laws of church and state, is what holds her to the fellow, past a doubt. Maybe you have seen a small young man named Bob Willis around the town—a ship's surgeon, or something of that kind? No? This Willis knew the pair in Jamaica, or Tobago, or wherever Percy was stationed, and fell in love with the fair Kitty. It may be that she liked Willis; but Willis was poor, and Percy was supposed to be rich. Willis is here now. He sends money to the woman, but never goes near her, and he follows Percy around and slaps his face every day; but Percy won't fight him. Percy is afraid of the little surgeon."

James left the coffee-house without waiting to hear more. He went home and sat for a long time staring at the flame of his candle. The expression of his face and eyes had changed within the past six months, and again within the last hour. Nothing had softened, and yet the set of the lips was less devilishly playful than of old. The formidable eyes looked tired.

God had struck James Burnham in the very core of the dark soul without so much as scarring the perfect body, shaking the pitiless brain, or dismaying the hard heart. He was sick of life, sick of anger and ambition, sick of blood-lust and money-lust; but, curiously enough, one emotion of youth was left to him—his old, ignoble infatuation for Kitty.

Now he sat for a long time and stared at the flame of the candle.

The new clothes came from the tailor next day, but when James went out on the night's business he did not wear them. He issued into the dark street in rough, seafaring kit, with a bearded face and dirty hands. In this disguise he visited many cheap and disreputable taverns and gaming-houses in search of Percy Stanton. He had no success that night, but on the next he found his enemy.

He did not accost Stanton, but watched him furtively from a shadowed corner. The fellow had sunk to a terrible depth since the morning of the duel on the sands of Nevis. His face was gross and purple and loose-lipped; and his soul, which

was three parts coward and one part brute, looked shamelessly out of the bloodshot eyes.

His attire, which still showed signs of its former glory, was rent and unclean. He drank gluttonously of cheap spirits and threw dice with two companions as disreputable as himself.

When Stanton at last got to his feet and reeled out of the place, James Burnham rang a shilling upon the table and followed him. They had not gone far from the pot-house in which they had been drinking when Stanton was accosted by a crippled beggar. The beggar asked for a penny, but Stanton gave him a blow with his fist which sent him into the foul gutter cursing and whining.

Leaving the cripple to pick himself up and recover his crutches, Stanton continued on his reeling way, with the bearded seaman still on his track. James noted the incident with satisfaction, for it suggested to him a plan of conduct for the future. He felt no pity for the cripple.

James must have followed his unsuspecting guide a matter of half a mile through alleys and streets, crooked, narrow, and mean, before the jour-

ney ended. Stanton entered a black doorway. Burnham heard him stagger heavily up a shaking staircase and beat upon a quaking door. The portal opened, a woman cried out faintly and fearfully, and the door was shut with a bang.

James hesitated for a moment, then entered the house and went noiselessly and cautiously up the decrepit stairs. The damp air of the place smelled of mildew and poverty, rags and misery. With his widespread hands Burnham felt the broken stair-rail on one side and the broken plaster of the wall on the other. He saw a thread of light under the door on the first landing.

He stood listening to the sound of half-suppressed sobs from the other side of the door; then, swiftly assuming the gait and facial expression of extreme alcoholic intoxication, he pushed open the door and staggered across the threshold. He halted just within the room, swaying on his feet and surveying the depressing and dramatic scene with a drunken leer.

The woman who sobbed was Kitty—but not the blooming Kitty that he had known of old in Lon-

don, or a few short months ago in Nevis. Her plentiful hair streamed untidily upon her shoulders, her small face was thin and pale, her eyes were dim and her lids swollen from much weeping, and her gown was torn. She was on her feet beside an overturned chair, trying to wrench herself free from her husband.

Stanton held her by one thin wrist, with his left hand, and in his right hand he grasped a stick of that flexible West Indian plant called supple-jack. His hand was raised to strike at the instant of James Burnham's entrance. The two became motionless as figures of wax at the opening of the door; and so they stood for a time, as if spellbound, staring at the bearded and intoxicated mariner. The scene was illuminated by two tallow dips which stood on a table near the over-turned chair.

Stanton was the first to move. He dropped the woman's wrist and rushed unsteadily at the intruder with a volley of oaths. The bearded seaman stepped aside with amazing agility for one in his apparent condition and shot out a long leg. Stanton came to the uncarpeted floor with a crash.

The intruder snatched up the discarded supple-jack and laced the prostrate husband about the back and legs until the cloth of the garments was cut into ribbons. This done, he left the room without a word, and returned to the street by the way he had come up from it, taking the supple-jack with him.

On the next night James attired himself in his new, fine clothes, his new wig, and his new hat. He cut a distinguished figure. Before leaving his bedroom he produced the artificial hump of leather from its hiding-place. He laid the contrivance on the dressing-table between the two candles, untied some thongs on the under side of it, and raised a flap of leather.

Evidently the thing was a receptable as well as a disguise, for from its hollow interior he drew several small but heavy packets, done up securely in canvas. With the point of his knife he cut the threads which bound one of the packets. He turned back the canvas, and a blaze of many-colored fires leaped up between his hands.

There lay diamonds, alive with white flames and

blue flames; rubies pulsing as red as living hearts; emeralds and sapphires—the glinting, wonderful things which he had taken and paid for in blood to the everlasting damnation of his soul.

He surveyed them without eagerness, without repulsion, without emotion of any kind. The time had been when such a display of treasure would have set his eye glinting and his blood racing; but now, with cool eyes and unshaken fingers, he selected a dozen of the smaller stones from the mass and stowed them away in a pocket of his coat. He then returned the rest of the collection to its hiding-place.

James Burnham knew London high and low. There were pawnbrokers in London then as now; and the peculiar characteristics of that ancient calling have not changed in a fraction over two centuries. James went to one of these, and to exactly the right one for his purpose. With his fine clothes and his fine manner he passed himself off as a reckless young lord who had lost so heavily at play that he was reduced to selling the family trinkets.

Thanks to the devilish glint in his eyes, which

could still return upon occasion, he drove a far better bargain than any young lord would have driven, and left the premises with a canvas bag containing minted gold to at least one-third of the value of the stones. He returned straight to his lodgings.

James continued to haunt the town of nights, sometimes as a dandy, sometimes as a decent, middle-aged scholar with a slightly humped back, and sometimes as a bearded mariner. He saw nothing of Robert Willis; and it was not until the fifth night after he had administered the beating with the supple-jack that he saw Stanton back in his favorite tavern.

He had been waiting for this very thing; and, as soon as darkness filled the streets again, he slipped out of his humble lodgings arrayed in his bravest attire. Hidden upon his gorgeous person he carried fifty guineas and, in the form of six fine diamonds, the value of a thousand guineas.

He hired a chair at the corner of the street and in it made the journey to Stanton's lodgings. He paid and dismissed the men at the black doorway, and they did not wait to be told twice to return.

James drew his sword, and, with a knife in his left hand, ascended the shaking stairs, for this was a risky place for a gentleman dressed like a marquis or a duke. But, as he arrived on the landing he returned the sword to its scabbard and the knife to its sheath, and rapped softly on the door.

The door was opened by Kitty. James stepped smartly within and shut the door behind him. Kitty uttered a little cry and recoiled from him fearfully. She fled to the farther side of the little table.

"You!" she cried, with a hand on her breast. "I knew you—that night you came and beat him—though you wore a great beard. He did not know you. Why have you come? Is not my misery black enough as it is?"

James bowed, hat in hand. He smiled grimly.

"Calm yourself," he said. "I have no intention of beating you, my dear. I leave that to your charming husband. You will be good enough to remember that I never so much as raised a hand against you in my life. Why are you afraid of me? Why do you hate me?"

"I think you are the evil one," she replied faintly.

"If I am the evil one, then what is Stanton?"

"He is a fool, a coward, a beast; but I do not fear him. I despise him—yes, and now I hate him; but I do not fear him. He married me."

"But didn't I offer to marry you? Yes, and now I repeat the offer."

She gazed at him with terror-stricken eyes. She shivered.

"Very well, my dear," he continued. "You have told me, plainer than words, that I'm no longer to your liking. Strange, too, for now I am rich—and in the old days you did not act as if I were entirely repulsive to you. And you hate Stanton. What about Willis?"

She fell to her knees with a cry piteous beyond description. She crawled to him on her knees.

"Kill me, as you will," she cried, "but do not harm him. He is good and kind and brave. I would kill myself, but for him. He cares—and I love him, love him! Spare him, for Heaven's sake!"

XIX

JAMES BURNHAM looked down at the distracted woman kneeling in supplication at his feet, and for a fleeting instant his face worked convulsively. Then he stepped back a pace, out of reach of her pleading hands, and laughed lightly.

"Go back to the chair and sit down, my good girl," he said. "Willis is in no danger from me, and never was. As for yourself, I would not harm a hair of your silly head. And now tell me, my dear, why Mr. Willis does not make an end of your precious husband? He's a man, is Bob."

"He cannot force Percy to fight with him," whispered Kitty.

James smiled and brushed a perfumed handkerchief across his lips. The woman, now seated in the chair, continued to gaze at him in terror-stricken yet fascinated inquiry.

"So!" said James. "Master Percy is afraid of the little man, of course; and yet he was a very

good swordsman when I fought him that morning in Nevis. I made a mistake in not finishing him then. But tell me this, my dear—if anything should happen to Master Stanton, would Willis come to you?"

"He waits at the Green Dragon," she replied. "I have but to send a word to him—or go to him. But—but would you murder Percy? It would benefit you nothing. Nothing, do you hear?"

"I have murdered better men, and for nothing," answered James. "But I did not come here to talk about myself. Your brother John, who escaped from the guardians of the law and engaged in business in the West Indies, sent this bag of guineas and these stones to you by my hand. Hide them away, there's a good girl. I promised John that they should not fall into Stanton's hands."

He placed the guineas and the six diamonds on the little table in front of her, turned, and hastened from the room and the house. He went blindly for several hundred yards. Then, his wits clearing suddenly, he drew his sword and continued his journey with caution.

He reached his lodgings without accident. A church clock chimed eleven as he unlocked his door.

Percy Stanton reeled out of the Spotted Dog at exactly two hours after midnight. He was in his usual condition, and, finding the flagged footpath too narrow for him, made frequent excursions into the cobbled gutter.

Here was a pretty state of affairs for a man of his parts, he reflected—and all because he had been fool enough to let Kitty trick him into marrying her. She was a sly little puss, she was!

He cursed thickly at the thought and vowed he'd make the skin jump on her shoulders when he got home. The supple-jack had gone, 'tis true; but he had a leather belt that would serve his purpose.

The corner of Hound Alley and Little Spanish Street was very dark. In a black doorway sat an ancient cripple. In one hand he grasped two golden guineas—undreamed-of wealth. He grinned and listened—and waited. In the gutter waited another ragged and crooked fellow, leaning heavily upon the crutches which he had rented for a little while from the cripple in the doorway.

Out of Hound Alley staggered Stanton.

"A penny, cap'n!" whined the fellow in the gutter. "A penny for pore old 'Odge what lost 'is leg a servin' o' 'is king!"

He hitched himself across Stanton's course; and just as Stanton cursed him and struck at him with a stout stick, he thrust one of his crutches between Stanton's feet. Down crashed the bully in the gutter. The cripple instantly dropped the crutches, flung himself upon the prostrate sot, and drove a knife hilt-deep into the quivering back again and again. He sprang to his feet at last, recovered his crutches, and returned them to the old fellow in the doorway.

"And here is another yellow boy for you, mate," he said. "Now take my advice and stir your stumps. You want to be a long way from here before morning!"

With this he turned and walked briskly away. The real cripple bit the third guinea with his two remaining teeth by way of a test, then stowed it and the other two in a place of concealment among his rags. He chuckled. He fixed his crutches

under his arms and hitched himself across the footpath to where Stanton's lifeless form sprawled in the gutter.

The old man prodded the body with one of his crutches and chuckled again. At last he left it and stumped away—and that quarter of London knew him no more.

When Stanton's corpse was found at sunrise, the landlord of the Spotted Dog identified it and gave its address to the authorities. So it was carried off and presented to the widow. Kitty screamed and fainted. When she came out of her swoon she accepted the coroner's opinion that Stanton had come by his death in a drunken brawl. He had a reputation for drunkenness, it seems.

Kitty voiced no opinion of her own. She paid a tallow-faced man in rusty black the sum of thirty shillings to take the remains away and give them decent burial.

Kitty did not send for Willis immediately, for she was afraid. James Burnham had killed her husband. Might he not kill her lover? He had promised not to hurt Bob, 'tis true; but she was

afraid. Why had he given money and diamonds to her if he did not mean harm to Willis?

And what of this money? For her own part, she was glad of it; but what would Bob Willis say to it? She knew nothing of her brother's fate or career as a pirate; but she felt sure that the gold and stones had not come from him. She more than suspected their history, having heard the rumor, aboard the frigate, that James Burnham had turned pirate.

Theoretically the gleaming coins and glinting stones were red with innocent blood. She could not see it; but she knew that Willis would. How was she to benefit by James Burnham's generosity?

Kitty passed three days and nights in nerve-racking fear and doubt. She spent some of the guineas in food and clothing and the payment of small debts, but she came to no plan of action concerning the diamonds. James Burnham did not return, to her vast relief.

On the fourth day of her widowhood she sent to the Green Dragon for Willis. The messenger returned with word that the gentleman was sick of

a fever and quite out of his mind. So Kitty forgot her fear of James Burnham, her worry concerning the precious stones, and thought only of the little surgeon.

She took up her abode at the Green Dragon, which was a quiet and respectable inn, far removed from the miserable tenement and street to which she and Stanton had descended, in the character of the sick gentleman's sister. She was from the country, she said. She played the part to perfection, nursed her lover night and day, had in the best doctor, and paid all charges as she went.

To cut a long story short, Willis recovered from the fever and married Kitty without delay. Nursing him had evidently agreed with her, for she had recovered her looks to an amazing extent. She told him nothing of James Burnham's visit or gift. It was decided that they should go to the country and live very quietly in his home village, where he would practice his profession.

On the night before the morning of their departure from London they sat for hours at their open window. Her head rested upon his shoulder

and his right arm was about her slender waist. He told her of his people, of the old farmhouse, of the broad acres, of the sleepy village. His father was a substantial yeoman, proud of his class and his family traditions. His mother was the youngest daughter of a small country gentleman.

There was a cottage of old pink brick in the village, its walls clambered over by climbing roses, which would be theirs for the asking. Even should his practice be small, want would not touch them. The gray face of want and the delirious glare of great riches had alike been unknown to any Willis for two hundred years.

These things he whispered to her, and many more of a like nature. They soothed her hungry, wearied little heart like strains of heavenly music.

A quick step sounded upon the stairs and a loud knock rang upon the door. Kitty's heart jumped in her side, and a chill like the chill of death's shadow went through her blood. Had James Burnham come? Was this paradise, upon the threshold of which she and her beloved stood, to be shattered from her hands and lips in shameful ruin?

The six diamonds which James had given her seemed to burn into the flesh of her breast like bits of red-hot iron. There in the soft dark she covered her face with her hands and breathed a frenzied prayer for mercy.

Willis opened the door, all unconscious of his wife's agony of apprehension. On the threshold stood James Burnham, gorgeously attired, with one of the servants of the inn at his elbow holding two candles in silver sticks. He bowed and extended his hand to the surgeon. Willis took it.

"I have only now heard of your happiness, Bob," said James. "I am sailing to-morrow, and so hastened here to congratulate you. You and I were good friends, Bob!"

"Yes," replied Willis awkwardly, remembering the rumors he had heard aboard the frigate. "Yes, Jim. Indeed, you are very kind."

"Give my most respectful regards to your wife, lad," said James. "I admired her greatly in Nevis. I am growing old, Bob—and something of a sentimentalist, I fear. Your hand again, lad. Good night and good-by!"

With that he turned and went swiftly down the stairs, leaving the surgeon gaping on the threshold.

Willis recovered his wits at last, took the candles from the servant, and turned into the room. He set the candles on the table and closed the door.

"It was James Burnham," he said, peering toward his wife, who sat in the gloom by the open window, beyond the poor light of the candles. "He came to wish us joy, trigged out like a dandy at her majesty's court—and a bloody pirate, 'tis said! It would be no more than my duty, as an honest citizen, to inform the authorities of his presence in London. His hands reek with the blood of hundreds, if we could but see it. His fine clothes are sodden with innocent blood. The jewels on his fingers are the devil's wages to him for work well done—if what I have been told is true. I should have held him when he was here. I should have thrown the charge in his teeth; but the amazing self-assurance of the man and the suddenness and fine manners of him scattered my wits."

"No, no!" cried Kitty. "He was your friend once."

"Aye, he was my friend; and I still feel a sneaking, dishonest affection for him," replied Willis. "I held his hand just now—not the hand of the murderer of innocent voyagers, but the hand of the duelist that wrought so well for me that morning on the sands of Nevis. But there—I meant not to say that! The past is dead, sweeting. As for James Burnham, he is safe from any word or act of mine—and it was like you, my wife, who had known him only as an acquaintance for a little while in Nevis, to plead for him!"

He came over to her and took her in his arms. She clung to him and wept.

Half an hour later, when Kitty was alone for a minute, she tore a tiny pouch of silk from her bosom and flung it from the open window with all her strength. I like to think that the six diamonds were picked up by some poor fellow in desperate need of food and raiment for himself, his wife, and children; but I know nothing of their fate.

XX

MR. JAMES FITZWALTER, the bookish, middle-aged gentleman of the scratch-wig, humped shoulders, and decent blue coat, paid his bill and left his lodgings. He departed with his leather bag in his hand and two porters following with his boxes, and never again was he seen by his landlady, nor by the little maid who had served his simple meals to him and blacked his square-toed shoes.

At the same time, in another quarter of the town, a distinguished-looking stranger was missed from the foppish companies of certain fashionable coffee-houses; and the Spotted Dog saw no more a particular bearded mariner who had become famous in that infamous retreat for his silver-lined pocket, his silent tongue, and his formidable eye.

James was tired of life. He had known little in life save vileness, and of that he was now heartily sick. Wickedness had grown monotonous to him. Now that his pockets were full of gold, he knew how little is to be bought with it.

In his narrow berth in the merchantman that was taking him back to the green isles and narrow seas he lay awake for hours every night, thinking, thinking. His thoughts dealt often with Kitty. He wondered why he had wanted her so persistently—why, for that matter, he wanted her still.

"After all is said and done, the fact remains that I loved the pretty wench, else I'd never have let her go to Willis when I had her in my hand," he reflected.

This reflection amused him, but it was a bitter sort of amusement that sometimes verged on self-pity. He liked to recall and repicture in his clear mind the night of his capture and escape in Bottle Harbor. He could see Alexander's face now, close to his own, white and unmistakable in the dark, and twisted with anxiety and a desperate purpose. He felt his brother's fingers on his wrists again, and the shearing cut of the knife across the gnawing cords.

It pleased him to think that his brother had set him free from the grip of the law—that he owed his deliverance to a man of his own blood. This

thought often served to drive terrible pictures from his mind.

Within a day of his landing in the iniquitous town of Port Royal, James happened upon young Henry Todd. Poor Todd's last shilling was gone, for in the slashing life of Port Royal he had found himself to be a pigeon among hawks. He was frightened, bewildered, and hungry, and at sight of James he wept for joy.

James cursed Henry Todd roundly, threatened to beat him if he did not cease his blubbering instantly, then slipped five guineas into his hand and ordered him to buy food and decent clothing.

In Port Royal, James lived a riotous but dreary week. He cared nothing for the morrow; and yet it did not occur to him that the simplest way to outwit the morning was to draw a knife across his own throat during the night. For seven days he threw his money to the right and the left, and living and reasoning only from glass to glass, from oath to oath, from moment to moment—and always with the devoted Henry Todd at his elbow.

Then a press-gang from Admiral Benbow's ship

found him in a harborside dive, surrounded by empty bowls and drunken parasites. The parasites made feeble but noisy resistance to the press-gang; but James, who seemed to be as sober as a judge, raised no protest with voice or hand. He ordered Henry Todd to return his knife to its sheath, silenced his bawling companions with an oath, then doffed his hat to the young lieutenant who commanded the press. He vowed that nothing could possibly suit his humor like serving her majesty against the French, threw gold upon the table, and shouted for a fresh brew of punch for all hands.

What had promised to be a bloody impressment became a friendly party.

"I see that you are a gentleman, sir—a man of education and property," said the lieutenant; "so I must let you go."

"Not at all, sir!" replied James. "If the admiral needs men, then let him take men of breeding as well as the sweepings of the port. I am at his service. My name is James Fitzwalter. But a word in your ear, my dear sir—which same I shall expect you to repeat into the ear of the ad-

miral. I know something of big guns; and if fifty guineas will buy me the rating and berth of a master gunner, then do I most freely volunteer my services to her majesty and Admiral Benbow."

"This is very handsome of you," replied the young officer; "and, as we happen to be short of gunners as well as seamen, I'm firmly of the opinion that your services and your guineas will be accepted."

Lieutenant Jenkyn was right. And so it came about that James Burnham, otherwise James Fitzwalter, went aboard the line-of-battle ship *Breda*, of seventy guns, to serve his queen and country. He was called before the admiral.

"How is this?" cried John Benbow, glaring at the recruit. "You possess fifty guineas and a knowledge of great guns, and you volunteer to serve in this ship as a master gunner? Explain yourself, my good sir."

"My last fifty guineas, your honor," lied James, bowing. "Again, sir, I have but recently become a widower."

"Enough," replied the admiral. "If you can

fight your guns, that is all I ask. I'm in no position to look a gift-horse in the teeth. I am short of men, devilish short—and Du Casse is somewhere to the south, with five ships and four frigates, and I must be after him."

So James was given command of five guns on the upper deck, forward, on the starboard side. Though the discipline of the flag-ship was like iron, rules were few; and so it happened that Master Gunner Fitzwalter messed as frequently with the midshipmen and junior lieutenants as with his brother master gunners.

He always wore linen; and, moreover, his linen and his lace were always scrupulously clean. The humble Todd saw to that. His coat was of decent blue, his breeches of spotless white, his stockings of black silk. He wore no wig, but his hair was always neatly tied and freshly powdered.

He might have worn a full-bottomed wig for all John Benbow would have cared—so long as he attended to his duties. At his side he carried a straight, slender sword with a silver hilt. He talked little, read much, and nursed his five guns

and his twenty men like a mother. His crews were constantly at drill, and for their extra work he paid them out of his own pocket.

Since joining the *Breda* he had ceased to live for the moment but for the fight; but beyond the fight his thoughts did not go. Neither hope nor ambition awoke in him, but he was conscious of something new and soothing in his burned heart—contentment.

On the morning of July 11, 1702, Admiral Benbow sailed out of Port Royal in search of Admiral du Casse. Benbow's flag flew on the *Breda.* His fleet consisted of the ships *Breda, Defiance, Windsor, Greenwich,* and *Pendennis,* and the frigates *Ruby* and *Falmouth.*

A rough, tough old sailor was John Benbow, with the heart and the manners of a lion. He had tested his courage and learned his manners in a hard school. His officers immediately in touch with him, of his own ship, respected him, but felt no love for him. His men thought him the greatest sailor afloat—but they feared him like the evil one. He was a lonely soul, and old at fifty-two.

He was quick to find fault with his subordinates and equally slow to praise them; but he never found fault with his new master gunner. Perhaps he recognized in Mr. Fitzwalter another lonely soul. The admiral never spoke to James in blame or in commendation; but on the evening of the sixth day out of port he walked down to where the volunteer gunner leaned against one of his guns.

James stood straight and touched his hat. The admiral halted before him and glared.

"Take command of all the starboard guns on this deck, Mr. Fitz-What's-Yer-Name, and see that you get crews and guns up to your standard in short order. Shift your hammock and your mess to the gun-room. I will see to it that your rank is confirmed later by the so-called proper authorities."

Here was promotion with a vengeance! James was pleased, but in no degree elated; and he was amused.

"Suppose they don't find me out until I'm an admiral?" he reflected. "Would they hang me to my own yard-arm then, I wonder?"

And still he felt no desire to look into the future

beyond the battle which was sure to take place as soon as the French fleet was found. Life held nothing for him, he knew, but one more fight—and death. He was done with ambition, lust, and anxiety; but he was proud of his efficiency. So he devoted himself to the task of bringing up the standard of his ten new guns and their crews to that of the five guns and crews which had been his from the first. The guns and their tackles were thoroughly overhauled, and the men were drilled until the weaklings dropped.

Superior to fatigue himself, and hardened to the sweltering sun and listless airs, James sweated his men like a slave-driver. Purely as a matter of pride he was determined that the glaring admiral should not regret having promoted him. His men found him a bitter, hard master, but generous with his silver.

On the morning of August 19 the enemy was sighted off Santa Marta. The French ships were all aboard on the blue, and the English were likewise widely scattered. Du Casse, it would seem, was in no hurry to fight and yet in no mind to run

away. The wind was a mere hot breath, now struggling to fill a great sail and now fainting and falling utterly.

The admiral signaled for his captains to come aboard the flag-ship for consultation and instructions. The *Ruby,* a brig of twenty-four guns, was the nearest of the fleet to the *Breda,* and so Captain Walton was the first to come aboard. He paced the quarter-deck with the admiral, the commander, the sailing master, and the first lieutenant. He was a small man with an ugly face, a broken nose, and dull eyes. His gait was shambling, his clothes were ill-set and none too new. In short, he was a most undistinguished looking sailor; and yet Benbow eyed him almost kindly.

The other captains arrived one by one, evidently in no great haste to receive their instructions. Benbow welcomed them with glares and continued his talk with Walton.

Kirkby, of the *Defiance,* was the last to arrive. It was close upon noon when he came over the *Breda's* side, and yet his ship lay not more than two miles away. This was too much for the ad-

miral's temper, which exploded in a volley of abuse. The captains returned to their commands with red faces and tingling ears.

The two fleets rolled idly in sight of each other all day. During the night a little wind awoke for an hour or two, and the admiral signaled with great lanterns for his ships to close up on him and advance in column; but the wind fell before much was accomplished in the way of closing up on the flag-ship.

Morning showed the French ships as far away as on the previous day, but not so widely scattered upon the blue. A light wind sprang up, and Admiral Benbow flew the signal to advance.

The other ships drew in. The French fleet moved toward the east for several hours, then swung northward straight away from the coast. Benbow shifted his course to cut the enemy off from the open sea and signaled his captains to follow him.

On the morning of the 21st Admiral Benbow beheld the fleet of Admiral du Casse in line across his bows and the French flag-ship almost within gunshot. Of his own vessels, the little *Ruby* was

close astern; the others were far in the rear or far to the right and left. He cursed his captains for fools and laggards, signaled for advance and general action, and crowded on sail.

The *Breda* struck the center of the French line at ten o'clock in the morning; and so commenced one of the most incredible sea-fights in history, and surely the most infamous recorded in the annals of the British navy.

Benbow ran between two of the French ships, gave them each a broadside, took some of their metal in return, and passed on. The *Ruby* sheered off a little, crossed the stern of Du Casse's ship, and raked her with ten guns. The English ship and brig had the heels of the French ships. They were faster, handier, and better sailed.

By noon no other English ship had come up. The battle was a slow-moving game of run, turn, bite, and run again. Singly and in pairs, the French ships chased or met the *Breda* or the *Ruby,* gave a broadside and received one, and chased again. The rest of the English fleet watched the fight from afar and followed it cautiously.

The luck of John Benbow was only equaled by his valor—and by his rage against his craven captains. His spars continued to stand as if by magic; and every broadside of his wrought havoc to the enemy aloft and below. The *Ruby* was not quite so fortunate, and just before sunset drew aside from the core of the unequal fight.

The *Ruby* returned to the fight at dawn, and all day the two did battle against the nine, while the other English ships hung off and watched.

By the third morning James Burnham was in command of all the guns on the *Breda's* upper deck, starboard and larboard; and never before, perhaps, had guns been served so furiously, yet so faultlessly. A third of his men were dead or disabled, and yet the fire of his artillery never failed when a target was presented.

Now he set his own hand to the tackle. His coat was gone, his fine shirt was torn, and blood and powder-smoke begrimed him. Henry Todd, who had deserted his sheltered but harrowing tasks in the cockpit, fought and sweated at the gun captain's elbow.

In a lull in the cannonading the admiral descended from the quarter-deck and picked his way among the dead and wounded to where the gun captain stood a little withdrawn from the crew of the nearest gun. James did not see the admiral, but was staring off across a splintered rail at one of the craven English ships. His shirt, wet, torn, and stained, was ripped away from one shoulder, leaving displayed that distinguished but now infamous design on the white and glistening skin.

Benbow halted behind the gun captain. The tattooed device caught his eyes. He stared with hardening eyes.

"What do I see on your back, Mr. Fitzwalter?" he asked in a low, grinding voice.

James turned. Blood and sweat ran upon his face. His eyes darkened, but their glance did not waver from that of the admiral.

"It is a mark which my father put there when I was a child, sir," the gun captain replied composedly.

"And a very distinguished heraldic device, to boot," returned John Benbow. "I have heard of it,

honorably and dishonorably, in these seas and elsewhere. So your name is Burnham! Let me believe it to be Alexander Burnham, late a distinguished officer in this service."

"I regret to say, sir, that I cannot claim that honor. My name is James Burnham."

"You are the *Wasp,* then—the most notorious, bloody pirate these seas have known since the days of Flint!"

"It would be useless to deny it, sir," replied the gun captain in a somewhat pinched voice. "But, for Heaven's sake, let me finish this fight!" he cried, a sudden spasm suddenly wrecking the composure of his blood-stained face. "Let me see this fight through, I beg of you!"

John Benbow's eyes wavered.

"Very good," he said. "Very good! You have worked your guns bravely, sir; but if you are alive after the fight, and I have a yard left, you shall swing! Yes, even if you were my own son! And here's my hand on it, lad."

They shook hands gravely; then the admiral swung on his heel and returned to the quarter-deck.

A couple of French ships were soon within pistol-range again, and James went back to his work with unflagging zest and frightful execution.

The murderous hail from his broadside soon sent one of the enemy reeling off to recover her breath; but others closed in. Burnham took the place of one man, of two, of an entire gun's crew. His strength seemed more than human. His men fell on his right, on his left, against his breast, and at his feet, and he ran red with their blood. Still he drove the survivors to their guns and worked his own.

Benbow saw that he was fighting a hopeless fight, for his craven captains still hung inactive on the skirts of the battle. Only the little *Ruby* was with him, shattered of hull, cluttered with wreckage, with only her mainmast standing, but still sailing and fighting.

So he drew out of the fight, hoping for no more than to get back to port with the *Breda* and the brig, and to arrange for the hanging of the cowards who had deserted him, their country, and their queen.

It was not until the night of the third day of the battle that the two heroic vessels cleared their skirts of the enemy for long enough to make some repairs to their spars and hulls. The survivors of the two crews toiled all night at planks and ropes and spars, hopefully preparing for honorable escape; but when morning broke, with a piping wind, John Benbow changed his mind.

"We are not beaten yet," said he.

Again he flew his signals for general action and turned upon the enemy—and again the valorous *Ruby* obeyed the order. This was the fourth day of the battle of one ship and one brig against five ships and four frigates. Two of the French ships were out of action. All showed the marks of British teeth.

That day's fight was not an hour advanced before a flying splinter of teak struck James Burnham across the chest and hurled him to the deck, senseless and dying. Henry Todd caught him in his arms as he fell. The admiral went down and knelt beside him. A surgeon poured brandy between the gray lips. Burnham opened his eyes.

"Lad, you would have been safe!" whispered Benbow. "I lied when I said otherwise."

"It is better this way," breathed James.

"May God have mercy on your soul," said the admiral tenderly.

"I look for no mercy," replied James. "Where is Todd? Right here, of course. Good-by to you, lad!"

He was dead before they could carry him below.

Half an hour later the admiral's right leg was smashed by a chain-shot. He ordered a cot to be brought to the quarter-deck. From the cot he directed the last desperate messages of that desperate fight.

But a terrible spirit of destruction had fled from the *Breda* with the flight of James Burnham's soul. No longer did her guns repulse the clinging ships of France. So, in mid-afternoon, on a strengthening wind, the *Breda* and the *Ruby* pulled sullenly away from the pack, still firing a few guns, still flying their country's flag. From the masthead of the *Breda* the order for a general attack still flashed.

The *Breda* and the *Ruby* reached Kingston Harbor at last, and the admiral was carried ashore. His leg was amputated, but on the 4th of November, seventy-two days after receiving the wound, he died of it.

Before his death two of his craven captains were shot at Plymouth, one was thrown into prison, and one was suspended. Another died before the court martial—'tis hoped by his own hand. Captain Walton, of the *Ruby,* was promoted.

Also, before his death, the admiral wrote the following letter to Sir Walter Burnham, of Burnham, Berkshire, baronet.

"SIR:

"I feel it my duty to inform you that, during my last engagement with the French, in which engagement I received the injury of which I am now dying, I was particularly attracted by the splendid energy and courage of a member of my ship's company who called himself James Fitzwalter.

"He had joined me in Port Royal, not long before this time, as a volunteer master gunner. Be-

cause of his ability and devotion to duty, I promoted him to the command of all the heavy guns on the starboard side of the upper deck of my flagship before we came in touch with M. du Casse.

"His work throughout the four days' battle was of the highest order. He was killed by a shot from the enemy on the morning of the fourth day. He died almost immediately after receiving the wound, fearless to the last, but without hope of the Divine Mercy; yet I cannot think that his prodigious services to queen and country during those four terrific days passed unappreciated by Almighty God.

"However that may be, sir, I am glad to be able to report that, in my humble opinion, the gun captain with the distinguished device tattooed on his back, just beneath the blade of the left shoulder, fought like a hero and died like a gentleman—however he may have fought and lived in the past. God have mercy on his soul!

"I have the honor to be, sir,

"Your humble, obedient servant,

"John Benbow,

"Admiral of the White."

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